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OR,
CIBUTA JOHN'S GREAT JUBILEE.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "CIBUTA JOHN, THE PRICKLY
PEAR FROM CACTUS PLAINS."

CHAPTER I.
THE MAN FROM JIMTOWN.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"I'm th' great old cross-eyed, long-legged,
full-o'-fight-an'-never-give-up rooster from
'way over, I am, an' don't ye fergit it!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo! Dee doo, dee-doo!"

"D'ye hear me crow?"

"Oh! I'm jest a holy terror, I am, an' I
kin lick any two-legged bird, beast or man ye
kin find 'twixt Manitob an' Tennersee! An'
you hear me!"

"I'm th' Shanghai Rooster from Jimtown
Lode!"

That is what he shouted, and such was his
way of shouting it.

"COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO! I'M TH' SHANGHAI ROOSTER FROM JIMTOWN LODE!"

He wanted it understood right at the beginning that he was a "chief."

He wanted to impress it upon the minds of his hearers that he was a regular old-time sachem—a warrior bold.

And, if size counted for aught, he was a "chief," although in other respects his looks belied his claim to that distinction.

"There was 'blood in his eye,' 'tis true; but it was not the blood which bespeaks conquest or vengeance. His was the blood-streaked eye of a hard drinker.

He was fully six feet six in height, and was broad and bony in proportion. He was red of hair and red of beard and red of face; and, as though to improve upon his natural redness, he wore a flaming-red shirt.

Over his red shirt he wore a Mexican jacket, while his trousers were of Kentucky jean and his boots of the roughest cowhide.

His hat was the regular style of rough-and-ready broad-brim felt, peculiar to the Westerner.

Taken altogether, he was a hard-looking customer.

His most striking peculiarity however, remains to be mentioned.

It was this.

Over each shoulder-blade the man wore a large out-spread wing. These wings were gorgeously spotted and streaked in red, green and yellow, and had evidently once been the property of some gigantic barn-yard rooster. They were securely fixed upon strong wires, and so arranged that by pulling a string the wearer could flap them at will.

He flapped them whenever he crowed.

Such was the extraordinary appearance of him who suddenly made his advent into the town of Ante-Bar one afternoon in early summer, and uttered the words quoted above.

Quite a little group of men in the "Pleasant Hour," Ante-Bar's best public saloon and restaurant, had been quietly discussing a coming important event, when into the room this strange individual walked, and introduced himself in the manner shown.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" he crowed again, after glaring around the room for a moment, and as he crowed he flapped his wings most vigorously.

"Heur I be—th' great old star-bangled hoosier! I'm a reg'lar old-time sun-baked fire-eater, I am, an' so ye kin tell yer people. Whoop-ee! I'm th' gamiest old game-bird ye ever heerd tell on! See my wings? Ain't they jest th' real quill an' feather? Wal, I should twitter!

"Say, though, ter come right down ter real old biz, who's th' boss o' this heur castle hall?"

"I'm th' man, stranger," said the proprietor, of the place, Bill Twicker, as he stepped to the front. "What kin I do fer ye?"

"Wal, fu'st an' foremost, an' right a-top o' everything, jist trot out a great big horn o' th' wery best old tanglefoot ye've got!"

"Sorry I can't 'blige ye, stranger," said Bill; "but th' fact is I don't sell likker heur."

The man from Jimtown stepped back amazed.

"Ye don't sell likker!" he ejaculated.

"Narry likker," Bill assured.

"Merry old tom-cats! What sort o' a haven o' rest do ye keep?"

"Jest what ye see, stranger; a pop'lar saloon an' restaurant."

"An' ye don't keep likker?"

"That's 'bout what I'm a-tryin' ter make ye understand."

"Eternal gall an' wormwood! Whar kin I git it?"

"You can't buy a drop o' strong drink in this hull town."

The man from Jimtown fairly groaned.

"Good Lucifer hear!" he gasped. "Heur it's been 'most a week since I've had even a smell o' th' genuine red-eye, an' ter think thet I can't git it now."

"This is too much, too much. It's more'n human natur' kin be expected ter bear. Behold, I weep."

"Tell me, though, pardner, wharfor' ye don't sell tanglefoot. Don't ye know that likker an' prosperity goes hand in hand?"

"Yes, I knows that; they goes hand in hand 'bout as far as th' poor-house. That's jest th' reason why we've shet down on it heur at Ante-Bar."

"Six months ago, stranger, this heur town

had seven gin-mills, all goin' at full blast. We also had a jail chock-full o' pris'ners fer various sorts o' crimes, an' th' prospects fer a poor-house wur mighty good.

"Wal, we see'd thet somethin' had ter be did. We either had ter hang a few pris'ners ter make room fer more, er else build a bigger jail; an' we either had ter build an' support a poor-house, er else kill th' paupers."

"Haw, haw, haw! Ruther rough on th' paupers!"

"Jest so, stranger; that's th' way we looked at it ourselves. Still, we didn't keer ter build an' support a poor-house. If we did that, an' built a wing onto th' jail too, we found we'd have ter close th' public school. We couldn't keep 'em all a-goin', no use tryin'."

"Wal, by an' by our postmaster solved th' problem fer us. He showed us that th' main head an' fountain spring o' all th' trouble was RUM."

"He told us if we'd jest shet down on th' rum traffic, that th' ship o' State would soon right herself, an' that our star o' prosperity would soon be in the ascendant."

"And, stranger, that's jest what we did. We shet up ther saloons, poured th' likker inter th' crick, an' made it a standin' law that no more should be sold heur."

"That was about six months ago. Ter-day th' jail is empty an' used fer a store-house; there ain't a pauper in th' hull town; an' th' poor-house question is a thing o' th' past. Th' school buildin', on the other hand, has been painted, an' refitted inside; an' now we're talkin' strongly o' puttin' up a little church."

"Oh! Ante-Bar is no slouch, I tell ye!"

"Fer these reasons, stranger, tharfor', and so forth, ye see it is onpossible ter sell ye any nose-paint; but ef ye want a b'ilin' cup o' coffee, or a rattlin' good glass o' milk, why I—"

"Haw, haw, haw! D'ye take me fer a babby what has ter be fed pap outen a spoon? Nixee, McGinnis! What I want is th' genuine out an' out fire-water o' th' noble red-man. I'm too old a bird ter go back ter milk an' water now."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo! Dee-doo, dee-doo!"

"Oh! I'm th' Shanghai Rooster from Jimtown Lode, I am, an' don't ye fergit it!"

"Well, Mr. Shanghai," said Bill, "I'm sorry I can't 'blige ye, but ye see how it are."

"Yas, I see. Tell me, though, what on airth did yer hard drinkers do when ye trumped ther trick on 'em this heur way? Did they turn toes up an' die?"

"Nary die! Some few on 'em reformed, but th' most pulled up stakes an' drifted out, an' that move benefited the town in more ways 'n one, I tell ye."

"But it don't benefit me, pardner; not worth a cent, it don't. I'm jest ready ter give up th' ghost fer a swig o' p'izin." And the man from Jimtown rubbed his stomach in a melancholy way.

"You'd better try a cup o' Bill's hot coffee, stranger," said Jem Patterson, who was one of the group. "It is mighty fine, an' it'll do ye a powerful sight o' good."

"No, I thank ye. Coffee is th' right sort o' drink at grub time, but it's no good atween meals."

"Say, how fur is it to th' next camp? I mean to th' nearest one where a feller kin git a nip o' th' ardent."

"Well," said Bill Twicker in reply. "Bung-eye Camp is about the nearest, stranger; an' that is a good six miles away, at least."

"Oh! this is too much, too much! It is more'n mortal man kin stand!" exclaimed the red giant.

Then, seeming to suddenly recollect something he had forgotten, he added:

"Pards, my bodily anguish has almost made me fergit th' business thet brought me heur. Kin any o' you fellers tell me whether thar's a man in this heur town by name o' Jones?"

A dozen voices answered him in the affirmative.

"Are his name John Jones?" the stranger next asked.

And the answer was:

"It be, stranger, fer a fact."

"Whoop-ee hooray! Then I'm jest right ter home! Whar is he?"

"He's out o' town jest at th' present time,"

replied Bill Twicker, "but he'll be heur when th' stage comes."

"All th' same, pardner, all th' same: I'll be heur ter meet him, you bet! Jest wait till me an' John Jones comes together, an' see if we don't jest make old Rome howl. We'll give this heur town one o' th' greatest free shows it ever see! We hain't seen each other fer years, John an' me hain't; an' we won't know how ter behave ourselves."

"So, John's gone out o' town, eh? Haw, haw, haw! I'll bet my best wing thet he's gone out o' town ter git a supply o' jig-water! No Jones thet I ever knowed could git along 'thout that."

"But," said Jem Patterson, "th' John Jones o' this town don't drink. He's th' Alcalde o' Ante-Bar."

"Gree-ate jee-umpin' hoss-fly!" the man from Jimtown gasped, as he dropped down onto a chair, "ye don't say so! Holy smoke! John Jones th' king-bee o' th' town, eh? Wal, wal, wal! Will wonders ever cease? An' ye say he don't drink! By jumpin'—But it can't be. You're jokin'."

"Nary a joke 'bout that," Jem declared.

"Say, though, stranger," Bill Twicker here put in, "what sort o' lookin' feller was th' John Jones you mean?"

"What sort o' lookin' feller? Why, he was 'bout my size, pardner, an' purty nigh ez good-lookin'."

"Giant John!" all present exclaimed in one breath.

"Yas, that war his handle, pardners, an' I'm his brother Jim."

CHAPTER II.

NEWS FOR THE SHANGHAI.

"GIANT JOHN" had once been a great rufian and bully at Ante-Bar, who had been hanged there for murder about a year previous to the time of which we now write.

If this new giant was indeed Giant John's brother, as he claimed to be, then it was clearly evident that he had not heard of his brother's untimely demise.

Among those seated in the saloon, besides Bill Twicker and Jem Patterson whose names have been mentioned, were Jeff Parsons, Tom Billings, Lawyer Skynn and others; but no one cared to be the first to break the news to the stranger.

For a moment silence reigned.

"Wal, what ails ye all?" the man from Jimtown queried. "Be ye all struck silly?"

"No, not jest that, stranger," Bill Twicker responded; "but thar's a slight misunderstanding heur. I guess th' John Jones that you mean an' th' John Jones that we mean ain't th' same John."

"Why, he must be, pardner—he must be. Didn't you say he war called 'Giant' John?"

"That was another one."

"Oh, I begin ter see! Ye had two of 'em heur, eh?"

"Jest so."

"Wal, what sort o' feller is th' John thet you mean?"

"Why, he's jest a noble-lookin' chap, 'bout mejum hight, broad-shouldered an' straight as ary Injun. He's got black eyes an' ha'r, an' fer good looks, stranger, he can't be beat."

"From th' drift o' yer remarks then, pardner, I take it thet 'Giant' John ain't heur any more. Whar is he?"

"Stranger, he's gone over."

"Gone over! Gone over whar?"

"He's gone over th' range."

"Dead?" the man from Jimtown cried, springing to his feet.

"Yas, stranger," Bill affirmed, "he's dead."

The winged giant paced the floor in an excited manner.

"Say!" he presently exclaimed. "What war th' manner o' his takin' off? Did he die nat'ral, or did he pass in his chips with his boots on?"

"He died in his boots."

"Bully fer him! Say, though, jest give us th' full partic'lars, will ye?"

"Sartainly, stranger; but I warn ye it won't reflect much glory on th' memory o' th' departed, an' perhaps I'd best not mention it."

"Go right ahead, pardner, an' give me th' facts. How did he die?"

"Wal, he died with his feet about a couple o' yards above th' ground. In short, he war hanged."

"Hanged! 'Giant' John Jones hanged! What war he hung fer?"

"Fer murder."

"Gree-ate jee-umpin' hoss-fly!" and the man from Jintown pranced around like a wild man. "Who did he kill?"

"He killed Judge Hucklebee, who was then th' sheriff, or alcalde, o' this town."

"Was it clear an' clean proof ag'in' him thet he done it?"

"Stranger, it war."

Here Phineas Skynn, the lawyer, arose.

"It was proof as clear as I ever saw, sir," he said. "I had the pleasure of being on the case myself, sir."

"Who be *you*?" the red giant cried, and so fiercely that the lawyer turned pale.

"You—I—do you mean who am I?" he gasped.

"Yas, I mean who be *you*!" the giant roared. And he looked so fierce that Mr. Skynn began to tremble.

"Why, sir, my *dear* sir," the frightened lawyer hastened to explain, "my name is Skynn, sir!—Phineas Skynn, lawyer, at your service, sir." And he made a most servile bow.

"So ye'r a skin, be ye? Wal, ye look like one, fer a fact! Come! No skulkin' ahind thet 'ar table! Jest step right out heur to th' fore. I want ter intervoo ye."

"But, my *dear* sir, I—I—"

"Stranger," Bill Twicker here interposed, "no disturbance in heur, if you *please*."

Instantly and unexpectedly the man from Jintown drew two heavy revolvers from his belt.

This was a surprise to all, and it gave the giant every advantage.

The man who is the first to draw his weapons in the Wild West, generally "holds the floor."

It was so in this case.

The red giant faced the crowd, and his every look and gesture indicated that he meant business.

"Jest you tend to your own affairs," he returned, glaring for an instant at Bill Twicker, "an' you'll be th' happier fer it."

"An' *you*, lawyer, you jest trot your carcass out heur, on th' double quick, er else I'll preferate ye right whar ye stand."

The poor lawyer obeyed, trembling in every limb.

"Did I understand you fer to say thet you had a hand in my brother's chokin' off?" the giant demanded.

"Well, y—es, sir; that is to say, sir, I had the misfortune to be retained in the case—"

"Hol' on, lawyer! Stop right thar! A minnit ago ye said ye had th' 'pleasure' o' bein' on that case. Now, talk straight, 'er else I'll bore a leetle hole right inter yer witals. You hear *me*!"

"Well, sir, I—I—I was on the case, sir."

"That's what I wanted ter git at. Now, bein' as you *was* on the case, you jest go ahead an' tell me th' hull facts, from first to last. Don't ye skip a single p'int."

The man of the law obeyed, or at least he started to, but he was soon interrupted again.

"Hol' on, lawyer, hol' on! Stop right whar ye be! D'ye say you wasn't heur when th' trouble first begun?"

"So I said, sir."

"Wal, then, I don't want ter hear th' story from *you*, not by a *long* sight! I want ter hear it from some feller who was right heur an' see'd an' heard it all."

"Then, sir," responded Mr. Skynn, glad to escape from his unpleasant position, "allow me to refer you to Mr. Twicker. Not only did he see it all, but he was the judge at the trial."

"That so?" the man from Jintown demanded, turning his attention to Bill Twicker.

"That are about th' size of it, stranger," Bill admitted.

"Then you're my mutton. Will ye give me th' hull story, jest as it happened?"

"Sartainly. But 'fore I begin, jest put up them 'ar pop-guns. Nobody heur is sp'ilin' fer a row, an' thar's no need fer you ter keep 'em in hand."

"Wal, I'll do it. Thar! Now go ahead," and having thrust his revolvers back into his belt, the giant sat down.

"Thar, now ye'r actin' wi' more sense,"

said Bill, as he too sat down. "An' now I'll give ye th' p'int's jest as they be."

"In th' first place, when *our* John kem to Ante-Bar *your* John picked a quarrel with him, an' got licked clean outen his boots."

"Giant John got licked?"

"You bet yer life he did."

"Great bob-tail tom-cats! This heur John o' yours must be a rip-snorter!"

The crowd laughed.

"That's just what he are, stranger, an' no mistake. We calls him 'Cibuta John, th' 'Prickly P'ar from Cactus Plains,' an' he's wuss'n th' biggest bunch o' ripe cactus *you* ever see'd. It would jest do yer heart good ter see him on th' war-path onc't. You'd think thar was a small earthquake a-skylarkin' around, I tell ye."

"But, ter go on with what I was goin' ter explain:

"After Giant John got licked, he an' a pard o' his tried ter waylay an' *murder* Cibuta John. It didn't work, though. Cibuta jest made 'em both pris'ners, an' marched 'em right inter town."

"We was goin' ter lock 'em up, but Cibuta he offered ter punish 'em himself. He offered ter fight 'em, both ter wunst."

"Ther deuce ye say."

"Jest so. Wal, we 'greed ter have it so, so Cibuta went out into the road, an' then we let Giant John and his pardner go fer him."

"Oh! I wish ye could 'a' seen it, stranger! Th' way Cibuta John did lay 'em out war a caution."

"Did he git away with *both* of 'em?"

"Yas, an' both ter wunst."

"Holy smoke!"

"But, that ain't all. When th' two p'izen cusses found they wur gittin' th' wu'st of it, they drew knives from the'r boots, whar none o' us had thought ter look fer a weepoon, an' tried ter take Cibuta John foul. An' it looked bad, I tell ye, fer Cibuta hadn't a single weepoon ter defend himself with."

"He had his arms an' fists, though, an' he jest knows how ter handle 'em, you bet. So, dodgin' around fer a minnit ter escape th' knives, he presently sent in a couple o' nose-splittin' blows an' laid both men out senseless."

"Ain't you a-puttin' it on a leetle too thick?" the man from Jintown queried.

"Not a bit, stranger. I kin prove it by a hundred men, if necessary."

"Wal, we locked Giant John an' his pard up in th' jail, an' next day Jedge Hucklebee ordered 'em ter leave town ferever."

"Did they go?"

"They did, you bet! We rode 'em out o' town on a rail."

"When we started with 'em Giant John made awful threats ag'in' Cibuta an' th' jedge, but o' course we paid no 'tention ter that."

"One mornin', though, this town woke up ter find Jedge Hucklebee dead, wi' a dagger buried in his breast. Then thar was trouble in camp, I tell ye."

"Th' dagger was one thet we all knowed belonged ter Cibuta John, an' ter make matters wuss, a piece o' one o' Cibuta's spurs was found in th' room."

"Great tom-cats!" cried the man from Jintown. "An' ye say ye hung Giant John fer it!"

"Jest so. But hear me out:

"Cibuta John was arrested, an' had a fair an' square trial, an', stranger, he war pronounced innercent."

"Innercent! An' all that 'ar proof ag'in' him?"

"That's what I said, stranger, he war pronounced *innercent*, an' thar wasn't a man in this town thet didn't believe it, either."

"Wal, whar does *Giant* John come in?"

"Oh! He kem in at th' hangin', he did, an' his pardner, too."

"They war both captured by th' jedge's darter, Nettie Hucklebee, wi' th' schoolmarm ter help her, an' th' proof was as clear as daylight."

"Th' giant an' his pard drugged Cibuta John, an' then at night th' giant climbed up inter Cibuta's room an' stole th' dagger an' th' piece o' spur. Then they went an' killed th' jedge, an' left th' dagger an' th' piece o' spur in th' room ter throw our suspicions onter Cibuta John."

"That's th' way they took their revenge fer bein' druv out o' town. It fixed th' poor

jedge, but wi' Cibuta it didn't work wu'th a cent. Ye see, they figgered on his bein' hung fer th' crime, an' so they'd kill two birds wi' one stone, as it wur."

"But, th' proof, pardner, th' proof! What war th' proof?" the winged giant queried.

"It war proof all sound an' strong, stranger, an' ye kin jest gamble on it."

"More'n that; th' giant's pard confessed th' hull biz."

"An' yer hung 'em?"

"Bet yer life we did! An', stranger, that's all. If ye want th' thing in poetic form, jest go to th' postmaster; or, better still, thar's a chap out East who's writ it up in story. It's called '*Cibuta John, th' Prickly P'ar from Cactus Plains*.'"

CHAPTER III.

THE SHANGHAI HAS FUN.

HARDLY had Bill Twicker concluded, when the man from Jintown sprung up, revolvers again in hand.

"*Cock-a-doodle-doo!*" he crowed, at the same time flapping his wings.

"Oh! I'm th' broad-backed terror from Terrorville, I am," he cried, "an' don't ye fergit!"

Bill Twicker and the others now began to look for trouble.

Bill had had his hand on his own revolver, and had intended to be the first to draw if the red giant showed any signs of making a disturbance, but the giant had been too quick for him.

It was evident that he was a far worse man than Giant John had been. He was quicker with his weapon, and he looked to be a harder fighter.

"Wal, s'pose ye be, stranger," said Bill in a conciliatory tone; "nobody's goin' ter object. Thar ain't a man in all Ante-Bar that will dispute yer claim. You're welcome ter be jest as big a chief as th' biggest. All we wants heur is peace."

"Haw, haw, haw!" the man from Jintown laughed. "In *course* thar ain't!" he cried. "Ef thar is, jest let him come right up an' dispute th' claim now!"

"*Cock-a-doodle-doo!*"

"Oh! I'm th' Shanghai Rooster from Jintown Lode, I am, an' I kin lick four times my weight in any sort of beast, bird or man!"

"I'd jest like ter see any man say I ain't a chief!"

"Whoo-oo-oo-op!"

"That's all right, stranger, that's all right," said Bill; "but don't let's have any trouble heur."

"In *course* it's all right," the giant cried. "You jest show me th' man thet dares to say it *ain't*. Blame me if I won't put a hole into him quicker'n a blind hoss kin wink his north eye."

"I'm on th' war-path now, I am, an' jest bear it in mind. This heur town has got ter square 'counts fer Giant John's death, an' you hear *me*!"

"That 'ar story ye told 'bout your Saw-buck John was a purty good make-up." But, ye can't fool me. I mean ter take th' case in hand now, an' I'm goin' ter make things jest more'n warm in this heur burgh."

"Why, it's jest ez plain ez day thet this heur Soap-box John o' yours was th' murderer. Jest look at th' proof! An' then ter think ye'd let him blind ye all by twistin' it 'round th' way he did, an' puttin' it onto poor Giant."

"Lawyer, look heur!" turning suddenly to lawyer Skynn. "Which side o' th' case was it thet *you* had th' 'pleasure' o' bein' on?" he demanded.

"I—I—was for the prosecution, sir," Mr. Skynn answered.

"I thought so! Now, you jest trot out heur, Mr. Skinny, an' we'll have the pleasure o' seein' ye dance."

"But, sir, my *dear* sir, I—I—I don't dance, sir."

"Trot out heur, I say!" And one of the giant's revolvers was turned full upon the trembling lawyer, causing him to obey the cali with the greatest alacrity.

"Now, then, dance!"

"But, sir, my *dear* sir, I—I *can't* dance. I never danced in my life, sir. I don't know how."

"Dance, I say!"

"I—I—can't. How can I, when I don't know how?"

"Wal, dance anyhow. Dance a cow-dance, ef ye can't do any better."

"But, I can't! It is impossible! I do not know how to move!"

The lawyer was badly scared, but his rising color indicated that he would not yield until he was actually forced to do so.

"Now, look heur, lawyer," the man from Jimtown cried, "you jest dance, er else I'll bore ye!"

"But, sir, the law! The law!"

"Dance! I say. Dance!"

"But, the law! The law! The law! Have you no fear of the LAW? Sir, I'll—"

"Whoop! Hol' on, lawyer! Stop yer hosses right thar. I'm th' law, th' law, th' law; th' court, th' court, th' court; an' th' jury, th' jury, th' jury! An' don't ye fergit, fergit, fergit it!" And as he spoke, the red giant advanced a step and thrust one of his revolvers squarely under Mr. Skynn's nose, once more commanding him to dance.

The lawyer danced.

But, what dancing it was! It caused every one present to laugh heartily. It was merely a hopping around, first on one foot and then on the other. The lawyer had spoken truly when he said he could not dance.

At the end of half a minute or so, he stopped.

"Dance!" cried the winged giant, fiercely, and the poor lawyer began again.

In about half a minute more, though, he stopped again.

"Dance!" cried his cruel taskmaster.

"But, sir," Mr. Skynn gasped, "I—I can't. I'm tired. I'm—"

"Dance!"

Again the poor lawyer had to obey. There was no help for it. The revolvers in the hands of so reckless-looking a man were great persuaders.

What poor Skynn suffered, no one but he himself knew. His breath came in quick, short gasps, the perspiration rolled down his face, and his feet almost refused to move. His dancing became the mere lifting of first one foot and then the other. And still the man from Jimtown cried "Dance!"

If the sight had been a ludicrous one at first, it was now pitiable to behold. That the victim was in agony, could be seen in his face. And still he was ordered to dance.

At last, however, the end came. With a groan the poor lawyer fell to the floor in a swoon.

"Haw, haw, haw!" the red giant roared. "Thar's one man out o' time! Come, now, who's next?"

No one volunteered.

The man from Jimtown was bent upon running things with a high hand. And, he held just the cards to do it. He held the "drop" on the whole crowd, and meant to keep it.

It must not be supposed that the men thus cornered were all cowards, for such they were not. The bravest men in the world may sometimes be placed at a disadvantage, and held powerless by a single man. It is only an occasional exceedingly cool, quick and daring individual that can turn the tables at such a time.

Such a man was Cibuta John, and those in the saloon heartily desired him to put in an appearance, though they knew they need not look for him before the arrival of the evening stage.

They all felt confident that he would clip the wings of this crowing Shanghai, and do it in particularly short meter, too.

"Come! Who'll dance next?" the man from Jimtown loudly bawled. "Don't all speak ter wunst, but give one another a fair chance. Come! Speak up, now."

"I wish Cibuta John war here," Bill Twicker declared. "I think he'd do a step or two fer ye, stranger, an' in a way thet would s'prise ye, too."

"I wish he wur," responded the giant, fiercely, "fer he's jest th' man I wan ter see. What is it ye call him—'Sky-blue' John? No matter, though. You jest p'int him out ter me when he gits heur, an' I'll 'gage ter eat him—hat, boots an' all. I hate ter hear a man talked 'bout as though he wur th' wery king o' th' rustlers an' couldn't be downed nchow. You jest let me git at him

wunst, an' I'll buckle his belt so tight fer him thet he can't git his breath. I'll cause him ter think th' last day has come."

"Come, though, somebody dance! I guess you'd better take a turn at it, pardner," and one of the giant's revolvers was turned upon Bill Twicker.

There was really no help for it, and Bill had to obey. He was the father of a family, and this big, overgrown bully looked "shoot" all over.

"All right," he exclaimed, with as good a grace as possible; "clear th' floor an' we'll begin."

"Th' floor's all cl'ar, so step right up an' git down ter biz. Thar, that's it. Now dance!"

And dance Bill did. He was a pretty good dancer, and he put it down in good style.

But like the unfortunate lawyer who, by the way, had recovered and crawled to a chair, he was not allowed to stop when he wanted to.

The moment he showed the least sign of flagging, the giant urged him on.

"Say, stranger," he presently gasped, "fer goodness' sake let up on me an' give some one else a chance. I'm no hog, an' I don't want all th' fun."

"You shet up an' save yer wind!" the red giant retorted; "an' jest keep on a-dancin'."

And keep on Bill did.

The two cocked and leveled revolvers were powerful persuaders.

At last, however, Bill gave out entirely, and fell panting into a chair.

"Haw! haw! haw!" the man from Jimtown fairly howled. "Oh! this heur is jest th' best fun I ever had! Haw! haw! haw! Thar goes man number two! Come, now; somebody else take th' floor, an' we'll keep th' ball a-rollin'."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"Oh, I'm jest a reg'lar old snappin' tarry-pin, I am, an' I'm on th' war-path ez big ez a hoss!"

"Come! Mosey out heur, some o' you galoots, an' don't keep me waitin'. This heur is th' grand overture an' prelude to th' revenge I'm goin' ter have fer th' death o' Giant John."

"Come, you two fellers back thar!" indicating Jeff Parsons and Tom Billings; "you git out heur an' let's see what you kin do."

Jeff and Tom obeyed, but very reluctantly. This was gall and wormwood to the citizens of Ante-Bar.

"Now, jest pitch right in an' do yer purtiest!" the man from Jimtown ordered, and the two began to dance.

Jem Patterson had been a quiet observer of all that passed, and he had been waiting and watching patiently for a chance to catch the giant off his guard and get a shot at him; and at last the chance came.

Quick as thought Jem drew a revolver, but, quick as he was, the man from Jimtown was quicker. One of his revolvers barked spitefully, and a bullet tore its way through the fleshy part of Jem's arm.

"Haw, haw, haw!" the giant laughed. "I've had me eye on you," he cried, "an' was expectin' that. How d'ye feel now? Did I hit th' bone? I didn't mean ter do it, if I did. I jest wanted ter sting ye a leetle." That shot decided the day.

The man from Jimtown held the best hand, and he knew how to play it, too.

He had everything his own way, and declared that he had never had so much fun in his life.

And still he kept the citizens dancing.

Whenever a new-comer ventured to look into the saloon, about the first thing to meet his view was the giant and his revolvers; and the giant would promptly invite him to come in.

The man would come, promptly.

As fast as one dancer gave out, another was ordered to take his place, and so the man from Jimtown carried on his fun for three full hours.

The afternoon drew toward its close, the stage came in and unloaded its passengers, the sun sunk behind the hills, and still the red giant continued to cry "Dance!"

At last, however, he tired of his sport and ordered one short dance by all present as a wind-up.

"Come!" he cried, "everybody up an' at it now, an' we'll close th' ball wi' a grand old

bob-tail waltz. Come! All hands around! Whoop her up, lively!"

And, glad for the chance to get the room into a general uproar, every one present *did* dance, and danced his hardest and loudest.

"Dance! Dance, ye beggars!" the giant cried. "Ye don't sell likkur heur, but, great tom-cats how ye kin dance!"

At this moment another voice cried:

"Hello! Hello, citizens! What are you all doing?"

All eyes turned toward the door.

There stood—Cibuta John.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ROOSTER STRIKES A SNAG.

Yes, Cibuta John it was.

He was a man who, once seen, was not likely to be forgotten.

There he stood in the open door, his hands thrust carelessly into the pockets of his jacket, and his face wearing a smile of amusement as he took in the situation at a glance.

He was a man of medium height, broad-shouldered and straight, and was both supple and athletic. His face was bold and handsome, the features clear-cut and regular, and his head was finely formed. His eyes were black and bright, his complexion was dark, a wealth of dark-brown hair rested upon his shoulders, and a heavy mustache shaded his mouth in a graceful curve.

He appeared to be about thirty years of age.

He was attired in a neatly fitting business-suit of American cut, the coat being of the popular short, square-cut pattern, commonly called "jacket." On his head he wore a broad-brim Western hat of the finest felt, which was set slightly back, thus exposing his face to good advantage. His hands, as mentioned, were thrust into his coat pockets.

When he made his presence known by exclaiming: "Hello! Hello, citizens! What are you all doing?" the dancing ceased at once, and all eyes turned toward him.

"Hallo, sport!" cried the man from Jimtown, before any one else could speak; "how d'ye do?" And he brought one of his revolvers to bear upon the new-comer.

"Come right in," he added, "an' see th' fun. Come right in."

"Hello, Cupid!" Cibuta responded, as he advanced into the room, "what are you doing?"

The instant he called the winged giant "Cupid," everybody present roared with laughter. The name sounded immensely funny, when applied to such a being as the Shanghai Rooster. No one but their hero, Cibuta John, could have named him half so well.

"Laugh, ye blamed ijits, ye, laugh!" the giant cried, his face turning more red than ever. "May be ye'd all like ter dance some more."

"Well, Cupid, what are you doing, anyhow?" Cibuta John queried again. "Have you set up a dancing-school here at Ante-Bar?"

"You jist look heur!" cried the giant, angrily. "My name ain't Cupid!"

"Yes it is," Cibuta declared, "for I have just named you. I'll bet the name will stick to you as long as you live, too."

"Wal, it ain't my name, an' I want ye ter understand it! My name is Jim Jones, th' Shanghai Rooster from Jimtown Lode! An' don't ye fergit it!"

"Well, Cupid is a better name than Jim, my friend, and we'll call you 'Cupid' Jones. Besides, a Cupid is supposed to wear wings, anyhow."

Again the crowd roared, and the man from Jimtown became fairly purple with rage.

Of course he had no idea that this sportive sport was the lauded Cibuta John, and perhaps it would have made no difference to him if he had known it. He resolved to take the style out of the young and independent stranger.

"See heur!" he cried. "You've got too much tongue!"

"That is what they used to tell me when I went to school. It is my misfortune, Cupid. I can't help it."

"Gol-dast your pictur'! D'ye mean ter keep on callin' me that?"

"Calling you what, Cupid?"
 "What? Why, that 'ar name."
 "Cupid?"
 "Yas, Cupid!"

"Why, certainly, Cupid; when I give a man a name I generally call him by it. I should think you would be proud of it. May be, though, you are not aware who the original Cupid was. He was the God of Love, and some claimed that he was produced without parents. See how neatly that hits you? You're the most 'lovely' creature I ever saw, and I shouldn't wonder if you were created without parents, too; for I don't know where on earth we would find parents worthy of you. Some, however, held that Cupid was the offspring of Venus and Mars, while others believed that Heaven and Earth were his parents; I don't pretend to know anything about it. He is always represented, though, as a plump, rosy-cheeked little cherub with a pair of wings, and armed with a bow and arrows. Oh! Cupid is the name for you, my friend, and no mistake. You are not armed with bow and arrows, 'tis true; but you're as red and rosy as the rising sun."

How the crowd did whoop and howl and laugh!

"Gree-ate jee-umpin' hoss-fly!" the man from Jimtown howled, fairly jumping up and down with rage. "I've a notion ter plug ye, right whar ye stand! Gol-dast yer pictur', anyhow! Can't ye see that I've got th' drop on ye? You'd better keep yer tongue a leetle more to yerself, er else down ye'll go. You hear me!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"Oh! I'm th' great old cross-eyed, long-legged, full o' fight an' never give-up he-hoss from-way over, I am, an' so ye kin go an' tell yer neighbors!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo! Dee-doo, dee-doo!"

"Jest hear me crow! Oh! I'm th' Shanghai Rooster from Jimtown Lode, I be, an' I kin whollop four times my weight in wild-cat, tom-cat, er anything else!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" And with his final crow, the giant gave a great flourish of his revolvers and an extra flap of his wings. Then he paused to note the effect he had produced.

Cibuta John simply stood and gazed at him, as though in surprise, but said never a word.

"Wal," the giant presently blurted out, "what d'ye think?"

"Say, Cupid," was Cibuta's response, "just do that again, will you?"

"Do what ag'in?"

"Why, crow and flap your pretty wings, and so forth."

"What d'ye want me ter do it ag'in fer?"

"Because it amuses me so."

"Oh! it does, eh?"

"Yes. I once went to a circus when I was a boy and you remind me of that circus so much that it makes me think I am a boy again!"

"How th' merry old tom-cats do I remind ye o' a circus? Come, now, jest unwind yerself an' let me know."

"Why, they had some sort of a thing there, half-monkey and half-rooster, which they called the 'What-is-it,' and you made me think of that. The What-is-it was better-looking than you are though."

Oh! but the crowd did whoop and howl and yell! This just tickled them, and their laughter fairly made the windows rattle. One would have imagined they wanted to prove true the saying that "he laughs best who laughs last."

And the bully—he fairly turned blue and green.

"Gree-ate jee-umpin' hoss-fly!" he screamed. "Fer two bits I'd shoot th' cabeezar right off o' yer shoulders! I look like a What-is-it, do I? I'll show ye what I look like, gol-dast yer pictur'! I'll show ye! I'd shoot ye right whar ye stand, ef it wasn't fur th' fun I'm goin' ter have wi' ye. Gosh hang ye, can't ye see thet I've got th' drop on ye?"

That was one fact which caused the crowd no little uneasiness.

The man from Jimtown had the drop on them, and in the worst kind of way, too; and they could not see how they could get out of it.

No one cared to attempt to draw after the sad failure Jem Patterson had made of it, and they were in a tight box. The giant was too good a shot to be trifled with.

They would have to trust all to their hero, Cibuta John; though how he was to help them, or himself, either, they could not see.

They noticed that the situation did not seem to trouble him any, however, and that gave them hope. There he stood before the giant, a smile upon his face and his hands still in his pockets. The giant's awful threat did not seem to discomfit him in the least.

"Pshaw, Cupid," he said, when the giant ceased speaking, "you don't mean it, do you?"

"I don't mean what?" the terror roared. "What is it I don't mean?"

"Why, you wouldn't shoot an unarmed man right down in cold blood, would you?"

"Wal, no, not ez long ez he has th' sense ter do ez I tell him ter do, an' gives me no back talk."

"Then I must look out not to 'rile' you up, eh?"

"You jest must, fer a fact."

"Well, now, Cupid, see here. You are not doing the square thing by me, not at all."

"What d'ye mean?"

"I mean just what I say. You are not doing the square thing by me. You invited me in here to see the fun. Where is the fun? Are you going to dance a jig, sing a song, or something in that line? If so, why don't you begin?"

"So, I called ye in heur ter see some fun, did I, eh?"

"You certainly did, Cupid."

"Wal, you'll see fun, an' more fun than ye want ter see, too, if ye don't stop callin' me that name! My name are Jim Jones, an' nothin' else; unless ye want ter give me my fightin' title—th' Shanghai Rooster from Jimtown Lode, which I won't object ter."

"Your name is Jones, eh?"

"It are, fer sure."

"Are you any relation to the late Giant John Jones? I notice that you look like him."

"Yas, he war my brother, he war, an' I tell ye this heur town o' Ante-Bar has got ter pay dear fer his takin' off, too. I've hearn all 'bout that case, an' I don't believe Giant John wur th' murderer at all. It wur that 'ar So-beautiful John, er whatever he's called, thet did it. That's my opin."

"Well, I don't agree with you, Cupid, for I happen to know a little about the case myself. I can assure you that no mistake was made in hanging Giant John, except that he wasn't hanged half soon enough."

"Then you had a hand in it, too, eh?"

"Well, yes, Cupid, I must admit that I had. Come, though, here you are going away off on another tack. Why don't you begin the fun you promised me?"

"So, you're achin' ter see some fun, be ye? Wal, we'll have some. I've been havin' piles o' fun heur this afternoon, watchin' th' citizens dance, but they're all tired out now, so s'pose you take a turn at it."

"Get out! You're joking!"

"Nary a joke; I want ye ter git right out thar an' dance! You hear me!"

The critical moment had at last arrived, and the crowd fairly held its breath.

How would it all end?

Cibuta John was the least excited of any in the room. He stood before the giant and gazed at him in surprise.

"You don't mean to say you want me to dance, do you?" he demanded

"Yas, that's jest what I said, an' ye'd better be a-gettin' at it, too. Come, now, step off, an' let's see what ye kin do."

"But, Cupid, I—"

"Thar, now, hold right up! I've heard that ar' name jest ez long ez I want ter, now, an' ef I hear it ag'in, down you'll go. Now then, dance!"

"Nary a dance."

"What! D'ye mean ter say ye won't?"

"That is just it, Cupid, you red-eyed son of a hump-back gin mill! You've been running things with a high hand here, and it is time your little game was blocked."

"Gree-ate, jee-umpin', tom-cats!" the man from Jimtown cried, fairly beside himself. "Ye won't dance, eh?" And in his blind rage he leveled his revolver and—

"Crack! Crack!"

Cibuta John's time had come.

CHAPTER V.

"CUPID" DANCES.

Not Cibuta John's time to die, however,

oh, no; but the time had come for him to take action.

And taken action he had, in a way that was a surprise to everybody.

The two shots fired were not from the revolvers of the man from Jimtown, but from two derringers, which Cibuta John carried in his jacket pockets.

Cibuta had been prepared to use them at any moment, and the instant he saw that the big bully meant "shoot," he let them go.

The result was wonderful.

The hero of the town had not aimed at the red giant himself, but at the revolvers he held in his hands; and the bullets from the derringers sent them flying out of his grasp and away to the further side of the room.

The Shanghai Rooster was struck dumb. For some moments he could not speak nor utter a sound, but stood and looked foolishly around him, as though to ask what it meant, anyhow.

But the crowd, the instant it realized what had been done, broke out in a wild cheer.

"Whoop—hurrah! Three cheers fer Cibuta John the Prickly P'ar! Hip—hip—hurrah! 'Rah! 'Rah! 'Rah!"

"Hullo, Rooster, how d'ye feel now?" some one asked.

"Why don't ye flop yer little wings an' crow?" another cried.

"Come, Cupid, ye purty bird, what ails ye?" a third queried. "Be ye struck dumb? Why don't ye open yer trap an' say suthin'? Be ye paralyzed?"

"Mr. Cupid Shanghai," said Bill Twicker, "low me ter interduce ye to Cibuta John, th' Prickly P'ar from Cactus Plains. Ye wanted us ter p'int him out ter ye when he got heur, an' thar he is. What d'ye think o' him? Now, ef ye want ter eat him, hat, boots an' all, as ye said ye would, jest pitch right in. Ef ye want ter buckle his belt up any tighter than it are, jest brace up an' begin ter buckle. Ef ye want ter impress it upon his mind thet th' last day has come, ye'd best be gettin' at it. Come! Don't ye stand thar like ary blamed ijgit, wi' yer mouth wide open, but let's see what ye're goin' ter do."

"Gree-ate hee-owlin' cyclones!" the giant finally ejaculated. "Did th' lightnin' strike me?" And he rubbed his benumbed hands to bring back their natural feeling.

The crowd laughed itself fairly hoarse.

As for Cibuta John, he stood there with his hands still in his pockets, for he did not take them out, be it understood, when he fired the two shots, but had blazed away right through the cloth, regardlessly.

It was not by any means the first time he had done it, though it was the first time the citizens of Ante-Bar had witnessed the feat.

"Well, Cupid, do you still insist upon my dancing?" Cibuta asked.

The man from Jimtown grunted out some sort of answer, and then added:

"So you're th' great chief o' this town—Side-buckle John, eh?"

"Cibuta John is what I am generally called," was the reply.

"An' you're th' feller what licked Giant John Jones, be ye?"

"I believe I did once have a little scrimmage with the gentleman you mention."

"A little scrimmage? Great old bob-tail tom-cats! It must 'a' been quite considerable o' scrimmage, I should say, ef you laid Giant John out like these galoots heur say ye did."

"Well, I have no doubt the gentlemen present have given you a correct account of the affair, Cupid; but why do you ask if I am the man?"

"Wal, I'll tell ye. If you licked Giant John, Mr. Somebody John, ye've done nothin' more'n I could do myself. I am Giant John's brother Jim, I am, an' Giant never see'd th' day that I couldn't lick him."

"Now, if ye want ter git hold o' th' best Jones in th' hull fambly, a reg'lar chip from th' original John P. Q. Jones, o' Revolutionary fame, jest tackle me. I'm a holy terror, I am, an' don't ye fergit it!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"Oh, I'm th' reg'lar old long-legged, full-jeweled, patent-lever, stem-windin'—"

"What-is-it!" somebody shouted.

"No, I ain't no What-is-it!" the giant retorted, thrusting his thumbs under his belt and striking an attitude as independently as though he were thoroughly armed and fully

prepared for business. "I'll tell ye what I am, though!" he shouted. "I'm—"

"Cupid Jones!" some one else cried out.

"No, ner I ain't no *Cupid*!" he fairly howled. "I'm th' Shanghai Rooster from Jimtown Lode, I am, an' I'm th' wu'st pill in th' hull box! I kin lick four times my weight in man, beast or bird! I'm th' great old cross-eyed, long-legged, full-o'-fight-an'-never-give-up rooster from 'way over, I am, an' don't ye fergit it!"

"*Cock-a-doodle-doo!*"

"You're a real old game-bird, eh?" Cibuta John queried.

"You jest bet yer sweet life I am! An', Mr. Sky-rocket John, er Side-pocket John, er whatever it is ye calls yerself, ef you'll jest come out in th' road heur, I'll turn ye inside out so quick it'll make yer head swim!"

"Pshaw! You're only joking!"

"Nary a joke! You jest come on out heur an' see if I be!"

"But, Cupid, that would spoil all the fun. It seems you have been having a dancing-class here, and it is no more than right that the dancing-master should take a step himself in order to show his pupils what the real art is; but if I were to go out and fight with you first, I am afraid you wouldn't be in fit condition to dance afterward, and your anxious pupils would be greatly disappointed. No, Cupid, I can't do it. We must see you dance."

"*Me* dance? Wal, I'd like ter see it! Haw! haw! haw! Who'd make me dance?"

"I will," Cibuta answered.

"You will! Haw, haw, haw! Wal, I'd like ter see it! Why, I'll—"

"No you won't, Cupid; so stop right where you are."

The red giant had made a quick movement toward his hip, where he carried his knife, but the movement was not half quick enough. Ere he could grasp the weapon, Cibuta John had him covered by a gleaming self-cocking revolver.

Little need is there to say that the giant *did* stop right where he was.

"You see, Cupid," Cibuta added, "I've got the 'bulge' on you in the very worst kind of way."

"Now, citizens, shall he dance? It is just as you say."

"Yes! Yes!"

"Make him dance!"

"Give it to him, an' give it to him strong!"

"Make him hump!"

"Sock it to him!"

Such were the cries heard on every hand. "You see, Cupid, there is no help for it, and you will have to dance."

"But I *won't* dance, an' that 'ar settles it!"

"Oh, yes you will, Cupid! You may think you won't, but you fool yourself. You will do it fast enough when I give you the word."

"Naw, I'll be hanged if I will!"

"Then I shall have to cut you all up with cold lead. I mean real old business, Cupid, and you can see it in my eyes."

"Make him do it, pard, make him do it!" exclaimed Bill Twicker. "He's been a-raisin' merry old hallalooyer heur all th' afternoon, an' we want ter git square with him."

"What has he been doing, Bill, anyhow?"

"Wal, he kem in heur first off wi' a great whoop an' crow, an' called fer likker; an' when we told him we'd shet down on likker heur at Ante-Bar, he got kind o' huffy an' r'iled up. Then he 'quired fer Giant John Jones, an' when we told him he'd been hung, then he got howlin' mad, an' swore he'd have revenge on th' hull town. He whipped out his pop-guns an' got th' drop on us, an' then made us all dance. Poor Skynn heur, he danced till he fell to th' floor, an' th' rest of us wasn't much better off. Jem Patterson heur, he tried ter draw a weepoon once, but th' giant plugged him in th' arm ez quick ez a wink. He's jest old chain lightning on th' shoot, this heur Shanghai What-is-it is, an' no mistook."

"So *that's* the kind of game you have been playing here, eh?" Cibuta John demanded. "Now, you just get right out there and dance!"

"No, I'll be—"

"You'll be cold meat if you don't, and I won't fool very long about it, either. *Now*

you dance!" And Cibuta brought his revolver up in a most threatening manner.

The man from Jimtown danced. He saw that Cibuta John meant business, right from the word go, and he made haste to obey. He could see it in the Prickly Pear's eyes that he would stand no nonsense.

Several others in the room had now drawn their weapons, and the red giant was in a tight box.

And he danced, oh! you may just bet he did! He put it right down for all he was worth.

"Go it, Cupid!"

"Keep it up, Shanghai!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"Bully fer th' rooster!"

"A little more on th' left leg!"

"Rah fer th' terror from Jimtown!"

Such cries and a hundred others greeted the bully from every side.

"Citizens," said Cibuta John, "this is the great no-horned, up-stroke, camel-backed, high-pressure old heathen from 'way over. He's the double-decked terror from the wilds of nowhere. He can whip four times his weight in any kind of flesh and bone you can find. Oh! he is one of the worst men who ever struck this town. But, laying aside his every other accomplishment, *how he can dance!*"

"Come, Cupid, come! You are not doing half enough! Just get yourself right up in style now, and show us what you can do!"

"Go a little heavier on that 'ar left leg!" cried Bill Twicker. "It's gettin' out o' tune."

"Oh! this heur is jest immense! *Ain't* it fun!" cried Jeff Parsons.

"Keep it up, Mr. Rooster," lawyer Skynn ventured to say. "You'll enjoy it, I am sure."

"What d'ye think o' th' Prickly Pear?"

"Dance! dance, you red-faced sinner!"

"He, he, he! Ho, ho, ho! Oh! ain't this jest royal!" And the crowd laughed until the windows all rattled, and there was danger of starting the shingles on the roof.

The man from Jimtown looked sick. The perspiration streamed down his face, he panted for breath and his wings drooped.

"Let—up!" he presently gasped. "Let—up, pard—ners, let—up! I—cave, I—cave. I—can't—dance—no—more!"

"Oh! yes you can!" was the unanimous shout. "Yes you can! You jest keep right on!"

"Oh! I—cave, I—cave! *Do—let—up!*"

"Nary a let."

The giant was getting paid in his own coin.

His wings now flapped around as limp as rags, his hat was off, his arms hung at his sides, powerless, and his legs almost refused to move.

"Still he was kept right at it, and they kept him at it until he dropped."

"Well done, Cupid, well done!" exclaimed Cibuta John. And he added:

"Now, boys, some of you tie his arms securely and lock him up, and to-morrow we will settle with him for the damage he has done to Jem Patterson."

"When a man comes to Ante-Bar with the idea that he is going to run the town, he's going to get badly left."

CHAPTER VI.

PREPARING FOR WAR.

"Now, pards, I have a notice heur, Which must concern ye all; If Mr. Twicker will allow, I'll tack it on th' wall."

So chimed Uncle Dan Derrick, the rhyme-making postmaster of the town of Ante-Bar, or, as he is better known, "Th' Poet o' Ante-Bar," as he entered Bill Twicker's saloon a few minutes after the vanquished man from Jimtown had been led away a prisoner.

"Sartainly, Uncle Dan, sartainly," said Bill; "post it right up an' let's see what it are."

The postmaster soon tacked the paper up on the wall, and then as he stepped back, he said:

"It kem this evenin' in th' mail, An' was addressed to me; But it is meant fer all o' you, Ez you kin plainly see."

The "notice" proved to be a legal document of most formidable appearance, and the crowd pushed forward eagerly to learn what it was.

Cibuta John read it out aloud.

It ran as follows:

"SUPREME COURT, SANTA FE, N. M., June 1, 18—."

"DON JUAN BARTOLO, Plaintiff,

AGAINST

THE OFFICERS AND CITIZENS OF THE TOWN OF ANTE-BAR, Defendants.

"SUMMONS.

"To the above-named Defendants, and each of them:—

"You are hereby summoned to answer the complaint in this action, and to serve a copy of your answer on the plaintiff's attorneys within thirty days after the service of this summons, exclusive of the day of service, showing cause why you should not at once and forever vacate the premises of the plaintiff, upon which the law holds that you are trespassers; or else pay rentals to, or purchase from him, the land you now usurp, inasmuch as he, the aforesaid plaintiff, holds a clear and valid title to all that tract of land herein described, as follows, to wit:

"All that certain—" etc., etc.

(Here followed a lengthy and minute description of a vast tract of land about sixty square miles in extent, in the northern part of which it was claimed that the town of Ante-Bar was situated.)

"And in case of your failure to appear or answer, judgment will be taken against you by default for the relief demanded in the complaint.

"Dated as above.

"JINGLE & JOY, Plaintiff's Attorneys, Santa Fe, N. M."

To this document, seal and ribbon were attached, and altogether it savored strongly of solid business from beginning to end.

It was not much of a surprise to any one present, however. In fact, the citizens of Ante-Bar had been expecting some such notice.

About four months previous to the time of which we write, this Don Juan Bartolo had come to Ante-Bar armed with papers to prove that he owned the land upon which the town stood, and ordered the citizens to pack up and "git."

Of course the citizens laughed at him in defiance.

Then he threatened them with the law, and this was the outcome of it.

Don Juan Bartolo was a Mexican, a man about thirty years of age, of medium height, well proportioned, and rather good-looking.

In personal appearance he was not greatly unlike Cibuta John, but his countenance did not wear the same frank, open and manly expression. On the contrary, that of the Mexican bespoke treachery and deceit.

He claimed that his father had been a general in the Mexican army, and that this tract of land in New Mexico had been given to him by the Mexican government as a reward for his services; and he being dead, of course the property fell to the son, his only kin.

The young man's papers seemed to be all straight, and his claim a legal one; but naturally the people of Ante-Bar objected to being ousted.

Finding that he was not a very welcome sojourner in that town, he had withdrawn to Bung-eye Camp, a small settlement about six miles distant.

"This heur is th' doin's o' thet 'ar p'izen Mexican cuss over to Bung-eye Camp!" exclaimed Bill Twicker, when Cibuta John finished reading.

"Undoubtedly it is," Cibuta agreed.

"An', what're we goin' ter do about it?" queried Jem Patterson, whose wounded arm had now been attended to and dressed.

"We will fight it out, of course," Cibuta John declared most emphatically. "I do not propose to get over the fence and leave my apples, just because the dog barks; not much!"

"Bully fer you! We'll fight it out, feller-citizens, if it takes seven forevers ter do it!"

"What is *your* opinion of th' case, lawyer Skynn?" Bill Twicker asked.

"Well," replied the lawyer, "I will tell you. I am afraid that Mr. Bartolo has the law on his side, my friends."

"He may have the *law* on his side, but Cibuta John acknowledged, "but that is not saying he has all the *justice*."

"Very true, very true," said the lawyer; "but if this thing is just as it is represented, I am afraid he holds the winning hand."

"You see, this Juan Bartolo claims that his father was an officer in the Mexican army, and that this tract of land was given to him as a reward for his services."

"This the young man can prove; and, his father being dead and he the only heir, of course the property is now his.

"When this territory came under the jurisdiction of the United States, the Government agreed to honor all claims which were recognized as valid by the Mexican government at that time, and this is one of them.

"If there is no flaw in any of the young man's papers, my friends, I am afraid he has the advantage.

"Still, I am ready and willing to fight for you, and fight we will, if you say so, till the sun ceases to rise."

"And that is just what we intend to do," said Cibuta John, "and you may depend on it."

And he added:

"These Mexicans never thought of looking up their old claims till after gold and silver mines were discovered here, and then every man who could hunt up even a ghost of a claim, did so.

"They may have plenty of law to back them, but they are not greatly overstocked with justice, for if no improvements and no discoveries had been made here, these old claims would have slept right on forever."

"That's so—that's so!"

"Th' Prickly P'ar is right."

"How old is this town now?" Cibuta asked.

"About eight years," replied Bill Twicker.

"And you never heard anything of this Don Juan Bartolo, nor of his claim, previous to his first coming here about four months ago?"

"Never a word."

"Then I would like to know whether possession for eight years, without protest being made, does not outlaw this old Bartolo claim. How is it, lawyer?"

"Was due notice published of your intention to settle here, and prior claimants invited to come forward and present their claims? Was due and legal warning given?" the lawyer asked.

"No," answered Jem Patterson, who was one of the original founders of the town; "we jest put down our claim-stakes an' stopped heur. We jest struck camp, wi' no preliminaries whatever."

"Then," said lawyer Skynn, "I fear the old claim will hold good. The Government is bound to recognize it, if it can be proved all straight and O. K."

"And the eight years count for naught, eh?" demanded Cibuta. "This Mexican allows you to go on for eight years, opening mines, building up the town and developing the wealth of the land, and then down he swoops and wants to gobble it all."

"And the chances are he will beat us, too, in spite of our teeth. In any event, I think it would require a much longer period than eight years of undisturbed possession to give you any hold against him. You are, in common language, simply 'squatters.'"

"Wal, ef we are," declared Bill Twicker, "we'll continue to 'squat,' an' don't ye ferget it!"

At this there was a general laugh.

"You are right, Bill," Cibuta John averred. "We will continue to hold the fort as long as there is anything to hold. We are in possession, and possession is about nine points of the law, so it is said."

"Yes," lawyer Skynn hastened to assert, "that is where our main hold lies, and we will make the most of it. And if we can show that this man knew of your settling here and did not warn you off, we will gain a grip on him. Besides, the Government has recognized the town by establishing a post-office here, and we will see what bearing that will have upon the case. Oh, there are more crooks and turns in a case at law than there are in a basket of live eels. And there is generally about as much squirming."

"Well, what response do we have to make to Messrs. Jingle & Joy?" Cibuta inquired.

"If we hev ter go to Santa Fe in force," Bill Twicker exclaimed, "thar'll be some joyful jinglin' thar, you bet."

At this there was another roar of laughter.

"Well," said the lawyer, in answer to the question, "you must engage counsel, answer the summons, and have the case brought to trial. I shall be most happy to take it up for you."

"An' you're jest th' old fossil we want,

too," declared Jem Patterson. "You ain't much o' a fighter wi' muscle or weepens, lawyer, but you're a power at law."

"Yes, lawyer Skynn's our man, every time!" several others proclaimed.

And that settled it. Phineas Skynn was retained as counsel for the town.

While this conversation and a great deal more was being carried on, Uncle Dan Derick, the postmaster, was busily engaged in studying the paper he had pasted up.

"Wal, Uncle Dan, what d'ye make out o' it?" Jem Patterson presently asked. "Come, can't ye shed a leetle ray o' wisdom on th' subject? Can't ye show us th' way out o' th' diffikilty? You're most allers our right-hand man in a case o' this kind."

"That's so, poet," asserted Bill Twicker; "so let's hear from ye."

Being thus called upon to give his opinion, the postmaster turned round and said:

"Wal, pards, I'll tell ye what I'd do, I'd jest survey this claim right through: Fer sence I've read this keerfully, I've hit upon a big idee. A leetle flaw, heur, I hev found, Which makes me think we're off that ground. This tells jist how th' lines all run, An' sez our crick's th' northern one; But, as ye all are well aware, Another crick runs back o' heur— Jest on th' other side th' hill. An' may be that will fill th' bill. Ef we kin prove that that's his crick, We'll make Bartolo mighty sick."

"I knowed it! I knowed that Uncle Dan could solve th' puzzle!" cried Jem Patterson.

"Bully fer th' postmaster!" Bill Twicker echoed.

"That is just what we will do," Cibuta John declared, as he caught the postmaster's idea. "We will have the ground surveyed. There are three or four of these little creeks within a few miles of here, and this is just as likely to mean one of them as another."

"The idea is a good one—a very good one," lawyer Skynn agreed, "and we will have the tract run out, by all means. This Mexican may have crowded northward a little, purposely to take in this town, and if he has we will catch him dead to rights. Let us make no mention of our intention, though, and then if we do catch them at any tricks we will have a surprise for them at the trial."

At that moment, who should walk in but Don Juan Bartolo himself.

CHAPTER VII.

A VILLAIN'S THREAT.

ABOUT the same time when the Shanghai Rooster from Jintown Lode was dancing in the Pleasant Hour Saloon—dancing as though his very life depended on it, another role was being enacted in the town of Ante-Bar to which the interests of our story demand that we turn our attention.

Not far from the Dew-drop Inn, Ante-Bar's principal hotel, stood a white house, which, as the reader will remember, was the home of Judge Hucklebee, the man who was murdered by Giant John Jones.

Here still lived the late judge's beautiful daughter, Miss Nettie Hucklebee, who was the acknowledged belle of the town.

The house, although owned by Miss Hucklebee, was occupied and managed by the young lady's friends, Mr. and Mrs. St. Claire, she making her home with them.

In point of fact, though, Miss Nettie was the recognized head of the household.

Nettie Hucklebee was truly a handsome girl. She was now about nineteen years of age, and was of medium height and exquisitely proportioned. She was just budding into the perfect flower—magnificent womanhood. Her complexion was of a delicate red and white, and marvelously clear; her eyes were of a deep velvety blue; her hair was golden in color, and rich and lustrous. Little wonder she was called "Th' belle o' th' Bar."

Not only was she the belle of Ante-Bar, but she was now the affianced bride of our hero—Cibuta John, and the day for their wedding was set and near at hand.

Somewhere along in our first chapter we mentioned that the group of men seated in the Pleasant Hour had been quietly discussing a "coming important event," etc., and that "event" was the approaching wedding. Great preparations had been made, and were still going on, to make it a memorable affair. It was intended to make it a great festival-day for the whole town—a day of gayety and merrymaking. An immense covered platform

for dancing had been built in the open air, excellent musical talent engaged, and a great many people from far and near were invited to attend.

It was expected that it would be the grandest fete the county had ever known.

In speaking of it, the people of Ante-Bar called it "Cibuta John's picnic," "th' Prickly P'ar's great jubilee," etc., and hence the title of this chronicle.

But, more of this anon. We find that we are digressing.

Early in the evening of which we are now treating, there came a caller to the Hucklebee mansion, who asked to see Miss Nettie Hucklebee.

This caller was a man.

He was a Mexican—to all appearances a Mexican gentleman, and was faultlessly attired in the habiliment peculiar to his native land.

The servant bade him enter, and then inquired his name.

"Don Juan Bartolo," the Mexican answered. And the servant having ushered him into the parlor, went at once in quest of the young lady, to apprise her of his presence.

In a few minutes Miss Hucklebee came down-stairs and entered the room.

The Mexican rose at once, and greeted her with a most courteous bow, saying, in his native language:

"I am so glad to see you, senorita. Your presence brightens the room the moment you enter. It would brighten a king's palace."

These words were uttered with all the fervor of a Spanish *galanteador* of old.

Miss Hucklebee smiled, greeted her visitor civilly, and invited him to resume his seat.

"You are quite a stranger at Ante-Bar, Senor Bartolo," she remarked; she, too, speaking in Spanish, which she understood thoroughly.

The Mexican had made the young lady's acquaintance during his few weeks' sojourn at Ante-Bar some months previously, before the citizens of the place had made it so unpleasant for him as to cause him to remove his head-quarters to the nearest neighboring town, which rejoiced in the name of Bungeye Camp, and by which title it has been already mentioned.

He had come to Ante-Bar highly recommended, and previous to his setting up his claim, and arrogantly demanding to be recognized as monarch of all he surveyed, had been favorably received. But the moment he had made known his desire to become lord high mayor, then the citizens gave him the cold shoulder at once.

"Yes," he responded. "I am quite a stranger here. Your people here made it quite plain to me that I was not very welcome, after I presented my claim and requested my rights, so I went away."

"It was too bad," said Nettie, "but it was only natural that the people should object. You see, the most of our citizens are rough, uneducated men, and your demand aroused their antagonistic spirits at once, and they took a dislike to you personally."

"I am sure, though, you cannot say that I treated you any differently after you had made your claim known, than before."

"True, I cannot; and yet you have as much interest at stake as any other person in the town. You are one of the chief usurpers of my rights, senorita. I cannot understand it. I should think you would hate me."

Nettie laughed.

"Oh, no!" she answered. "There is no reason why I should hate you, senor. You have always treated me gentlemanly enough, and have never injured me in any way; and so long as you continue to do the one, and not do the other, so long I shall respect you."

"Then I hope I shall always deserve your respect, senorita. I hope I shall always be able to observe the conditions by which I can claim it."

"You hope you shall, senor! Do you not know whether you will continue to observe the conditions I have named?"

"No, senorita, I do not."

"You do not! And why, pray?"

"Because, senorita, it will depend altogether upon you."

The young lady looked the surprise she felt.

"And why will it depend on me, señor?"
 "Will you not consider that I have injured you, when you have to surrender all your property here?"

"Oh! That would injure me, most certainly; but if the law decides that you are in the right, I, for one, shall give you your full due."

"Oh! Then you intend to resist my claim, eh?"

"Why, to be sure I shall. Would I not be foolish to give up all I possess, and beggar myself, unless forced to do so? If you take your case to court, señor, we will meet you there. But, though we are at war on a matter of business, I can, and shall, continue to treat you civilly so long as you deserve to be so treated."

"But suppose I win the case, señorita? Then you will hate me, certainly."

"Not so, señor."

"Not so!"

"No. I shall abide by the decision of the court, señor, and of course you will do the same. I would speak to you as civilly the day after my defeat, as I do now. As the popular saying has it, 'Business is business.' Social intercourse is something else."

"But, señorita, you are bound to lose. My claim cannot be disputed."

"That remains to be seen."

"And if you do lose, then by your own confession I shall have injured you; and by injuring you I shall break one of the conditions you name, and shall forfeit your respect."

"Señorita, I hope you will not allow me to break that condition. I had rather lose my right hand than lose your regard."

"Señor, I fail to understand you. You hint again that I have the power to control your action in this matter. I fail to see in what way my influence can change your determination. Pray explain yourself."

With a suddenness that almost alarmed her, and that surprised her beyond measure, the Mexican threw himself upon his knees at the young lady's feet.

"Señorita," he cried, "could you not guess—could you not see—that I love you? You are the very light of my life! I have loved you ever since the first moment I saw you four months ago, and my object in calling here to-night was to lay my heart at your feet and beg you to accept it and become my wife. Señorita, I love—" But here he was stopped.

"Señor, get up—do get up!" Miss Hucklebee exclaimed. "Do not make yourself ridiculous."

"Ridiculous! Ridiculous, and because I stoop to confess my love to so radiant a being as yourself! I am proud of my position."

"Señorita, I love you—passionately and devotedly love you. To claim you for my bride would make me the happiest man in all the world."

In vain did the young lady try to stop him. He was bound to be heard.

"Say that you will be mine," he cried, "and I will give up all claim to the property you hold. I will do more. I will give up all claim to the town. I will give the people of Ante-Bar a clear title to the property they now usurp. I—"

"Señor, stop!"

Finding that she could not make the Mexican stop by words of entreaty, the young lady sprung to her feet and commanded him to do so.

Don Juan did stop, and rose to his feet.

"You must stop, señor," the lady added. "I will not hear you—I have no right to hear you."

"You have no right to hear me! Are you—"

"I am the affianced bride of another, sir."

"Heavens and earth!" the Mexican cried, now in passion. "Can this be true?"

"Of course it is, sir. You have forced me to make it known to you."

"May I ask who the happy man is?"

"He is Mr. John Jones, of this place."

"He whom the people call Cibuta John?"

"The same."

The Mexican's eyes flashed fire, and hotly he hissed:

"By heavens, it shall never be! He shall never claim you for his own! You shall be mine, by fair means or foul! I swear it!"

"Sir!" now in plain English, "you

threaten me! Leave the house, and at once! You have now shamefully disregarded both the conditions by which you were to merit my respect, and I despise you instead. You are not worthy of my hatred, I simply disdain you. Go!"

Miss Hucklebee's loud and angry words brought her friend, Mrs. St. Clare, into the room in haste.

"What is the trouble, my dear?" she asked.

"I have been insulted," was the reply.

"And not only insulted, but threatened!"

"Insulted and threatened! By whom?"

"By that person, whom I have just ordered to leave the house." And Nettie pointed toward the Mexican with scorn.

"Then, sir, why do you not go?" Mrs. St. Clare demanded.

"I am going, ladies, I am going," the Mexican said, as he moved toward the door; and on reaching the door he paused for a moment to add:

"And you, señorita, remember what I have said. You shall be my bride, by fair means or foul. I have sworn it!"

The moment he was gone, Nettie fell fainting into her friend's arms.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DUEL BY MOONLIGHT.

WHEN Don Juan Bartolo left the house, he was in a towering passion.

He had failed miserably in the scheme which he had come to Ante-Bar purposely to carry out, and not only had he failed in that, but he had greatly overreached himself and exposed his villainous plans.

It had been his intention to magnify his power to Miss Hucklebee, show her that she would become a beggar as soon as he could get his claim settled, and thus prey upon her fears; and then when he had carried the game far enough, he intended to confess his love and ask her to become his wife, and thus save her from the ruin which threatened.

Such were his intentions, and so he had done; but it had not worked as he intended it should. The climax had been reached altogether too abruptly, and the effect had not been what he had anticipated.

Then, when he learned that the young lady was affianced to another, he lost all control of his temper and ruined his chances forever.

Now, no course lay open to him but to steal the girl and force her to become his wife.

That he resolved to do.

"Ten thousand curses upon the handsome angel!" he cried. "She shall be mine, I swear it!"

His passion was no doubt genuine enough, but he saw that he could never hope to win the girl by fair means.

As for Cibuta John, when he thought of him he clinched his hands and ground his teeth in fury.

He should never marry the girl, that he resolved.

"Curse him," he muttered, "I will seek a quarrel with him and remove him from my path."

The Mexican was no coward, but his intense rage now made him foolhardy.

He was determined to put his rival out of the way, and he did not stop to reason the result to himself if he succeeded in doing it.

He had gone too far now to draw back. He had uttered threats which could not be recalled. He must go ahead, or else back out and lose the prize.

"By all the fiends!" he cried, "Cibuta John shall die!" And he forthwith set out to find him.

He went first to the Dew-drop Inn; thence to the post-office, which he found closed; from there to Bob Burdock's store; and then to Bill Twicker's saloon, where he entered as shown, and there the object of his search was found.

Without a word he crossed the floor to where Cibuta John stood, and before any one could guess his intention he struck him a stinging blow in the face with his glove.

"Great Jerusalem!" cried Bill Twicker, excitedly, "that settles it! This ends th' claim biz, pards, an' ends it fer good. Bartoly-rolly-boly is a dead Greaser, fer sure!"

And so thought every one present.

For an instant Cibuta John did not act,

but stood and gazed at the Mexican in surprise, while the latter, with his hand ready upon a weapon, returned the stare.

This lasted but a moment, though, and then the reaction came.

And it came with a vengeance.

Cibuta John's arm shot upward and outward like a bolt of lightning, taking the Mexican under the jaw and sending him crashing over chairs and tables to the further end of the room, where he dropped to the floor almost insensible.

"How is that fer high?" cried Jeff Parsons.

"High as a kite!" returned Tom Billings.

"Th' cuss must be crazy!" declared Jem Patterson.

"I'll bet he's half-silly now, anyhow," said Bill Twicker. "I wonder what in th' world he could 'a' been thinkin' about?"

"Give it up!"

"He struck th' wrong man that time, fer sure!"

"Bet your life he did!"

"Do you know what he means by his action, friends?" Cibuta John asked.

"No; what does he mean?" came the query.

"He means that he wants me to fight a duel with him."

"Th' deuce he does!"

"That is what he is after, exactly."

"Wal, fer Heaven's sake, fight him, pard, an' let his want be filled. I'll bet he won't want th' same thing twice. Oh, you jest gratify him, pard, by all means, an' send him on his way rejoicin'. We'll back ye, pard, an' back ye ag'in' th' hull Mexican nation, if necessary."

So spoke Bill Twicker, and the crowd acquiesced in what he said. It was the public sentiment to a dot.

It was some minutes before the Mexican could pick himself up and shake himself together as he had been before, but at last he did so, and then he made the attempt to draw a revolver.

Cibuta John was entirely too quick for him, though. He had the drop on him before the Mexican could realize it.

"Now look here, Mexican," he said; "if you are thirsting for gore, I will see to it that your appetite is appeased as soon as possible. You shall have all the fight you want, and a little more. You must understand, though, that we do not allow any indiscriminate shooting here, and the quicker you get your hand out of that pocket the better it will be for your health. You can thank your lucky star that you are alive, anyhow. If I had struck you a little harder you would never have come to in this world again, and it was only that I had a doubt of your sanity that hindered me from doing it. Why, I never saw a man so anxious to commit suicide in my life before! Say, what have you got up your back, anyhow? What have I done to you? What did you strike me for?"

"I struck you because I hate you!" the Mexican answered, hotly. "I struck you because I want your life! This world is not large enough to hold us both, and one of us must die!"

"Well, that is news to me," Cibuta John declared. "I never had the least idea that I was crowding any one, I can assure you. Why, I do not require a great deal of room for myself, and you are welcome to all the rest of creation. You can have miles to my inches. Just allow me to have enough elbow-room to get around comfortably, and I am as happy as a sun-flower. It seems rather queerious how you have got the idea into your ugly mug that I am in your way. If you want more room, you lop-eared cur, why don't you take yourself off to the plains? There you could have whole miles to prance 'round in. Say, though, just explain yourself and give us an idea where your pain lies. What is it that is biting you, anyhow?"

The Mexican was fairly white with rage.

The Prickly Pear's taunting words angered him more and more.

"You American pig!" he cried, "I will eat you! Are you not man enough to meet me, after I have publicly insulted you? You are a cur! You—"

"There, say no more about it," said Cibuta.

"Just give me an idea what you want, and I will be right with you. I am one of the most liberal cusses you ever met. You may have it all your own way. Just name the

place and the tools, and I'll be there so quick it will make your brain reel. You flat-nosed son of a brindle-koodle! I'll turn you inside out before you can tell what has happened!"

"Brag is a poor dog," the Mexican sneered.

"I know he is. There is no brag about what I am telling you, though. I am ready to prove it to you. I am only waiting for you to say how you prefer to die, that is all."

"Will you meet me now, in the street, with pistols at twenty paces?"

"I'm your huckleberry, every time. Come right out there, and let's have the thing out. Just choose some man to pick you up and bury you, and I'll attend to making you ready for him. It would really be some satisfaction, though, to know what I am killing you for. You claim that I am in your way, but that can hardly be, for you are not in *my* way in the least. Where *does* the difficulty hinge? What *is* it that has roused you up so, and ruffled your feathers? I would like to know something more about it while you are in fit condition to tell me."

"Can you not guess?"

"No, I am not worth a cent at riddles."

"Then I will tell you. It is because but one of us can wed the beautiful Miss Hucklebee, and *that one shall be I!*"

Cibuta John's whole manner changed in an instant, and those who knew his way saw that he now meant business.

"Well, you impudent pup!" he cried. "Just get yourself out of doors in quick order, or I will drop you right where you stand. Do you think I will allow that lady's name to be mentioned by such as you? Come! The quicker we settle this thing, the better!" and he actually forced the Mexican to retreat out of doors.

It was a lovely night.

The round moon was sailing overhead, and it was almost as light as day.

The crowd poured out of the saloon, and the news of the coming fight spread around like wild-fire. In a few minutes both sides of the street were lined with eager spectators.

"Have you any one to act as your second?" Cibuta John asked.

"No," answered Bartolo, "I have not. I do not require any one."

"Oh! yes you do, or you will, at least, before you are done. Say, Tom," turning to Tom Billings, "you act for him, will you?"

"Sartainly," Tom responded. "I'll pick up his carcass, after you git done with him."

"And you, Jeff Parsons," Cibuta continued, "you act for me."

"You bet, boss," said Jeff, and he stepped to the fore.

"Now, Mexican," turning to the angry challenger, "how will you take it? Do you want it all at once, or in small doses?"

"It must be a duel to the death," was the response.

"Yes, that's all right; but do you want all your arms, or only one revolver?"

"Let each one keep whatever arms he may possess, and let it be a duel for life."

"All right. As I said before, I can agree to anything. Now, just pace off the distance, and then face about."

"Hold on," said Jeff Parsons and Tom Billings in one breath, "we'll attend to that ourselves." And they proceeded to measure the ground and get their men into position.

In a few minutes all was ready, and the antagonists stood facing each other, each with a revolver in his right hand.

"Are you both ready?" was then asked.

"Yes," came the reply, "we are."

"Then somebody give the word," said Jeff Parsons.

"I'll do that," announced Bill Twicker. "I'll count three, and then cry 'fire,' and th' instant I say 'fire' both o' ye blaze away."

"Now, heur goes: One, two, three—*fire!*"

Both revolvers cracked at the same instant, and Cibuta John felt the Mexican's bullet graze his neck, while the Mexican gave a sudden start which showed he was hit.

It had been agreed that they were to fire twice by count, and after that were to go as they pleased.

Again Bill Twicker counted—"One, two, three, *fire!*" and again the weapons spoke.

This time Cibuta heard the ball whistle over his head, and again was the Mexican seen to start.

It was clear he was getting far the worst of it.

The two time-shots being fired, the revolver held by the Prickly Pear quickly barked again, and this time the Mexican's weapon was sent flying out of his hand.

Then came an unlooked-for and sudden ending. The Mexican fell to his knees and begged to be spared.

CHAPTER IX.

MARKED FOR LIFE.

It was a surprise to every one present. It was something no one had expected.

Right down in the middle of the street the Mexican had dropped, the very picture of abject terror.

"Spare me, senor, spare me!" he cried. "I am satisfied. I accept my defeat. Spare my life."

"Wal, I'll be gosh hanged if you ain't a healthy skunk for a man to act as second to," cried Tom Billings, in disgust. "Whar's yer sand all gone to? Git up, now, an' fight it out!"

"No, no!" the Mexican cried. "I am beat! I give up!"

"You're a fine specimen, then, *you* be. I'd sooner act as second to a yaller dog."

"Gosh all pertaters!" exclaimed Bill Twicker. "This heur beats th' merry Dutch. Why, from th' way the ball opened, I expected we would see one o' th' greatest fights on record, an' heur is Mexico knocked out in th' first round."

"You don't mean to say you are done, do you?" Cibuta John demanded.

"Yes, senor, I am defeated."

"But, you said this was to be a battle to the death. You are not playing according to your agreement. The audience will demand their money back if we do not carry out the programme. Come, get up and let me finish you. You have just got me roused up now, and I am thirsting for gore. You had better let me put on the finishing touch, hadn't you?"

"Oh, no, senor. Spare me, spare me."

"Are you sure you are satisfied?"

"Yes, senor, yes. I ask no more."

"And you think there will be room for both of us in the world, eh?"

"Yes, senor, yes."

"Well, then, get up. I will spare your worthless life."

The Mexican obeyed. He was completely cowed. The change which had come over him in so short a time was wonderful. At first, no one except Cibuta John could understand it.

When the Mexican rose to his feet, however, and the crowd pressed forward, then the secret came out.

It was discovered that the tip of each of the man's ears had been shot off, and that his right hand was badly wounded, the bullet which had torn his revolver from his grasp having glanced and cut its way through the flesh.

Finding Cibuta John to be so unerring a marksman, had completely unnerved the Mexican. He saw that his life was completely at the mercy of his antagonist, and that he was being toyed with as a cat toys with a mouse before putting it to death. He could not stand it, and hence his surrender.

"Great horned toads!" cried Bill Twicker.

"Did ye ever see sich shootin'? Dast me if th' Prickly Pear hain't cut a chunk right off o' both o' this feller's ears, ter say nothin' 'bout shootin' his pop-gun out o' his hand th' way he did. Pard, 'low me ter hint right heur thet Cibuta John are a chief, an' no mistake."

"I thought I would mark him so that we may always know him," said Cibuta. "He started the difficulty, and he must take the result. I could have killed him as easily as not, but I did not want to do that."

"It's a pity ye didn't, though," Jem Patterson declared. "He'll be striking you in th' back some time when you least expect it. These heur Mexicans is bad eggs."

"I shall look out for him, and I warn him now that he must keep clear of my path, or there will be blood spilled."

"What're ye goin' ter do with him?" Bill Twicker asked.

"Why, I guess we had better let him get out of town about as quick as he can, don't you think so?"

"Yes, that will do; an' while ye're about it, pard, jest warn him not to be seen heur ag'in."

"Do you hear that, Mexican?" Cibuta asked.

"Yes, senor, I hear," was the answer.

"Well, heed it. Just pick yourself up and get out of town as quick as you can, and never let us see your face here again."

"When you came here four months ago, you were treated as well as any man ever was treated. We all did the square thing by you, and you cannot deny it. I, as alcalde of the town, did all in my power to give you a footing here, on the strength of the letters of introduction you presented, and as long as you acted the part of a man, so long you stood in high favor."

"You had not been here long, though, before you began to show your true colors. You set up your claim, and then wanted us to recognize you as the czar of all the Rus sias, or something more."

"You fooled yourself badly."

"Had you acted the part of a man, you would have made known your business on the day of your arrival here, would have asked us what we would do, and then would have warned us of what you would do, and then gone about it in a business-like way; but you didn't."

"You courted favor for three or four weeks, or until you thought you were sure of your ground, and then you attempted to take right hold of the reins."

"You see, though, it didn't work."

"And now you have put on the finishing touch. You have clapped the climax grandly. If you are any the worse for wear, it is your own fault."

The Mexican ground his teeth in rage, as he nursed his wounded hand and caressed his injured ears, but his rage was impotent. He now realized that he was entirely alone in the enemy's camp, and it would have been better for him had he realized it a little sooner. Perhaps he would have shown the good sense to avoid a quarrel, and thus have preserved his beauty and saved his ears.

"It is your turn now," he hissed, "but mine will come. I shall soon have my rights restored to me, and then beware. I am defeated now, but my day will come."

"Let her come!" cried Bill Twicker. "In th' mean time, though, if ye've got any common sense left in yer cabeezar ye'll steer clear o' this heur burgh."

"When I come again," the Mexican retorted, "it will be to take possession of my property, and woe to the man who stands in my way."

"Do not count too much on that," Cibuta John warned. "We intend to fight this case as long as we have a leg to stand on, and as we are in possession you will not find it an easy matter to oust us."

"If the law can not give me my rights, then I shall use force." And the Mexican uttered the words hotly.

"And the moment you try that, my friend, your name will be Dennis—with a big D. You will find us the toughest gang you ever tackled. You have already had a taste of what we can do in the way of fighting, and whenever you feel a desire for more, call around and see us."

So returned the Prickly Pear.

At that moment there came some fresh actors upon the scene.

Two horsemen were seen coming down the street, and the moment they reached the crowd they brought their animals to a stop.

One of these new-comers was a Mexican, and evidently a man employed by the other as a guide, for his appearance indicated that such he was.

The other was an American.

He was a man about forty years of age, apparently, and was clad in garments of American style.

He was a short man, not very stout, and his hair and beard were tinged with gray.

He wore glasses.

"Ahem!" was his first utterance, as he and his companion halted. "Citizens, this town is Ante-Bar, is it not?" he then queried.

"It is, sir," Cibuta John responded.

"Ahem! Yes. Very good. Can you tell me where I can find the alcalde of the town?"

"I am he, sir," said Cibuta. "What can I do for you?"

"Ahem! Ah, yes. To be sure. Well, sir, I have come here on a little matter of business. By the way, can you tell me

whether there is a party here by name of Don Juan Bartolo?"

"That's a yaller cur o' that name heur, if that's what ye mean," exclaimed Bill Twicker, "an' thar he is." And he pointed to where Bartolo stood.

"Why, my dear Don," the man cried, the moment his eyes rested upon the Mexican, "what has happened to you?"

Bartolo was indeed a sight to behold. Both sides of his face and neck were covered with blood, and he was nursing his right hand in a most tender manner.

He acknowledged the truth at once, for it would have been useless for him to have attempted to do otherwise.

"I have just been fighting a duel," he explained, "and got the worst of it."

"Well, I should think so. Sorry for you, I assure you; but duels are bad affairs. Ahem! Yes, very."

"It'll l'arn him better'n to try ter handle prickly p'ars so reckless-like in future," averred Jem Patterson.

"Ahem! yes—yes; very likely. Sure I don't know much about it. But, Don Juan," turning to the Mexican, "introduce me."

"Senor Joy, one of my lawyers," said the Mexican simply, as he gave his sound hand a wave from the stranger to the crowd.

The introduction was short and sweet.

"Ahem! yes, Joy—Jingle & Joy, Santa Fe. Proud to know you, gentlemen," said the lawyer, in his quick way. "I am here on particular business. Can you conduct me to some public room where I can read a paper aloud?"

"Certainly, sir," responded Cibuta John. "Come right into this saloon," and he led the way into the Pleasant Hour.

The lawyer had dismounted and given his horse into the care of his guide, and he followed into the saloon at once.

Once there, he mounted a chair, drew a folded document from his pocket, and read it aloud to the people.

It was a copy of the summons which the postmaster had tacked up on the wall a short while previously.

It had now been served in due and legal form.

"We've heard somethin' about that 'ar before, Mr. Joyfully," said Bill Twicker.

"Ahem! yes—yes. Sent copy by mail. Allow me to remind—name Joy, *not* Joyfully. Ahem!"

"That's all right," said Bill. "I knowed there was Joy somewhar, anyhow."

Cibuta John now stepped forward, and said:

"Mr. Joy, allow me to introduce Mr. Phineas Skynn, our attorney, who will handle this case for us."

Mr. Skynn crowded to the fore, and the two lawyers shook hands.

"Yes," said Skynn, "I have the honor, sir, to represent the town and people, and will serve our answer upon you in due time."

"I can tell you now, though, that we are going to make it warm for you—*deuced* warm!"

"Bet yer life we are!" etc., the crowd echoed.

"Ahem! yes—yes," and Mr. Joy smiled serenely. "But you will lose. You have not the ghost of a chance to win."

"That remains to be seen," said Cibuta John.

"Yes, we will give you a hard fight. We'll fight with might an' main; An' if at first we don't succeed, We'll try an' try again."

So chimed the postmaster. And Mr. Joy glanced in his direction, smiled and said:

"You are tuneful, my venerable friend."

"That reminds me," said lawyer Skynn. "A suit for ejectment requires two verdicts, I believe. You have a hard task before you, Mr. Joy."

"An' we *wish* ye 'joy,'" added Bill Twicker, the irrepressible. "Thar'll be a joyful jinglin', you bet! But we'll 'Skynn' ye, spite o' yer teeth."

The lawyer's business being done, he accepted his client's invitation to go over to Bunge-eye Camp, and they set out at once.

CHAPTER X.

MOTHER WOLF'S WARNING.

As soon as Don Juan Bartolo was gone from the house, after the scene he had created

and the threat he had made, Mrs. St. Clare called for assistance; and when help came, Nettie Hucklebee was laid upon a sofa.

The shock had been too much for her. It had come upon her entirely unexpectedly, and she was not prepared for it.

She had always looked upon the Mexican as a gentleman, thinking him a little too impulsive, perhaps, in pressing his claim so unreasonably as he had done, but nothing worse.

Now, however, the mask was off, and she had seen him in his true colors.

Little wonder that her nerves gave way.

Restoratives were applied, and in a short time she sat up and looked around.

"Where am I?" were her first words.

"You are here with me, my dear," Miss St. Clare answered in a gentle tone. "You are perfectly safe now."

"Oh! Such a horrible dream I have had!" the girl cried. "I— Oh! No, it was *not* a dream! Where is he? Has he gone away?"

"Yes, yes. He is gone. What was it he said that so alarmed you? You know I do not understand much of Spanish."

"He insulted and threatened me."

"Yes, you told me that."

"He began by making love to me, and would not stop until I actually commanded him to do so. He said if I would marry him, he would give up all claim against Ante-Bar—actually asked me to sell myself to him for a price."

"The rascal! I never did like his looks."

"I always thought he was a gentleman, but now I see how sadly I was deceived."

"And you say he threatened you?"

"Yes. I had to tell him that I am to be married to John, in order to make him understand that I had no right to listen to him; and then he flew into an awful passion. He swore that John should never claim me, and that I should marry him. His last words when he left me were, 'You shall be my bride by fair means or foul! I have sworn it.'"

"What shall I do? I am afraid he really meant what he said, and I shall not dare to go out of the house."

"What shall you do? Why, we will send for John and tell him all about it."

"Oh! the cowardly villain! To think that he should have caused you such alarm. You are really all a-tremble."

"Yes, and I cannot help it. I feel that something dreadful is going to happen. I have an awful presentiment of danger."

"Tut-tut! It is only because your nerves have been shocked. There is no danger. No harm can come to you, my dear."

"I hope it may be as you say, but I cannot think so. Oh! I wish John would call in. Will you not send for him?"

"Yes, my dear, and at once." And Mrs. St. Clare rose to call for some one to send, when at that moment the door opened and an old woman entered the room.

"Mother Wolf!" the lady cried, as she stopped short in her surprise.

Mother Wolf it was, an old woman who lived up on the mountain a mile or so from the town, and who was said to be a veritable witch.

She was a witch in looks, if not in fact; but there was reason to believe that she was a witch in fact, too. Many strange and weird tales were told of her, and concerning her mysterious power, and some of them were unquestionably true.

She was old, wrinkled, and almost hideous to look upon.

"Yes, Mother Wolf it is," she whispered rather than spoke; "Mother Wolf it is." And then she laughed in a horrible way. And such a laugh! It was almost enough to curdle the blood of any one who did not know her.

"But what brings you here?" Mrs. St. Clare asked. "How did you get in?"

"Does not Mother Wolf always watch over those who are her good friends?" the hag queried. "Who sent her medicine and fed and cared for her all through her long illness? Was it not the sweet belle of the town—Miss Hucklebee? Yes, yes, she it was! And Mother Wolf does not forget her. Every night, as the sun sinks behind the hills, does Mother Wolf put her charms to test to find what fate holds in store for her pretty friend." And then again followed the horrible laugh.

"And you have learned that I am in danger?" Nettie quickly asked.

"Yes, my child," was the answer. "I have found that you are in danger, and in *great* danger."

Nettie sprung to her feet.

"I told you so," she exclaimed, addressing Mrs. St. Clare. "Oh! I knew it."

"What is the danger, Mother?" to the old witch.

"Nettie," Mrs. St. Clare here interposed, "you must not excite yourself so. You will be ill."

"And you, Mother Wolf, you should be more careful. Can you not see that your friend is all unnerved?"

"And should I spare her nerves to see her plunge headlong into danger, and all unwarned?" the old woman queried.

"You might have been more careful in making it known."

"Yes, yes. Mother Wolf is not a fine lady, though, and does not possess the fine feelings which belong to our sex. All that was lost long, long ago." And for a moment then the old hag rocked to and fro, and mumbled to herself.

"But, Mother," said Nettie, who by a great effort succeeded in overcoming her nervousness in a great degree, "you have not yet told me what my danger is. Tell me, I pray, and do not keep me in suspense."

"Yes, yes, my child, so I will. Mother Wolf never forgets her friends, though she sometimes forgives her enemies."

"There is a Mexican, I do not know his name, but that does not matter—a Mexican who has set his heart upon making you his bride."

"In outward appearance this man is a gentleman; but at heart he is a villain. Human life cannot stand between him and any object he desires to gain."

"He has sworn that you shall marry him, and in his heart he intends to remove your true lover from his path."

"There, there! Do not be alarmed. Mother Wolf has once foretold whom you shall wed, and her prophecy shall come true."

"What I would warn you of is this: Beware of this Mexican. Have nothing to do with him. And, above all, be well protected on the eve of your wedding. Beware, *beware!*"

When told that the life of her lover was threatened, Nettie had turned deathly pale; but when still assured that she should wed him, the warm blood returned to her face, causing her cheeks to bloom like roses red.

"And you say you do not know this man's name?" Miss St. Clare inquired.

"No," answered the witch, "but I can easily describe him. He is of medium height, well proportioned, rather good-looking, and about thirty years of age. He looks somewhat like your brother—this sweet girl's lover—but his eyes are not the same. In the depths of his heart are dark shadows, which find their way into his eyes, and make them appear as treacherous as the eyes of a snake. Such is his appearance."

"It is he—Don Juan Bartolo!" Nettie cried.

"Yes, he it is, surely," Mrs. St. Clare agreed.

To the surprise of both, the old witch had sprung to her feet, her face as pale as the wall behind her, and her eyes gleaming like live coals.

"That name, that name!" she gasped. "Speak that name again!" And with tightly-clinched hands she bent forward to catch the words.

"I said that you have described one Don Juan Bartolo," Miss Hucklebee repeated.

With a wild scream, that was as much like the cry of a wild beast as it was like the cry of a human being, the old woman flung her arms over her head, and then her voice subsided into her natural hideous laugh.

"That name, that name!" she hissed. "A thousand curses upon all who bear it!"

"You have heard it before?" Miss St. Clare wonderingly asked.

"Have I? Ay, to my sorrow. I was once— But, my story would only pain you. Be it enough for me to say this: If man of that name ever comes within reach of my arm, *he dies!*"

"Then he must have wronged you deeply."

"Yes, he did, he did!" He wronged me as deeply as ever trusting girl was wronged.

He made me what I am to-day—a witch, a wild woman of the mountains. Oh! a thousand curses upon him, and upon all his kin!"

"But, you say this man is but thirty years of age, while you are an old, old woman," Mrs. St. Clare remarked.

"True, true. I may be mistaken. This young man may be of no kin to him I speak of. The name is the same, though, and—Heavens! It may be *his son*!"

For a few moments then the old woman paced the floor in great excitement.

Then suddenly she paused and exclaimed: "Quick! Bring me a bowl or basin of water! I will see his face again, and scan it closely. I will know whether he is of that race or not!"

Filled with womanly curiosity, Mrs. St. Clare called a servant and bade her bring what was required.

In a few moments it was at hand.

The moonlight being so strong, no lamp had yet been lighted in the room, but to make it still more dark within, the old witch ordered the curtains to be drawn down.

"Now," said she, "we shall see his face; and, whatever he is doing at this moment, will appear in life-like reality. Prepare."

The basin of water had been placed upon a table in the center of the room, and around and around that table the old woman began to walk, making strange gesticulations over the bowl, and at the same time uttering a wild and weird chant of incantation.

Presently she paused, took a small vial from her bosom, and dropped one drop of its contents into the water.

Instantly a dense vapor arose, and then as that cleared away the water became luminous, and to such a degree that it dimly lighted the whole room.

When the vapor was all gone, then the old witch motioned the two ladies to step forward and see.

They obeyed, but at first they could see nothing in the bowl save the water, which glowed like molten gold.

Presently, however, outlines of light and shade appeared, which gradually assumed comprehensible shape and figure.

A street scene appeared. Crowds of men lined either side. Between those two crowds two figures gradually formed, and in his right hand each held a gleaming revolver. It was to be a duel. Over all the moon shed her rich, mellow light, and then as the outlines grew still more and more distinct in the bowl, the two duelists were recognized.

They were Cibuta John and Don Juan Bartolo.

"Oh! It is John!" cried Nettie Hucklebee, in great alarm.

"Hush!" the witch cautioned, "or the charm will be broken. See!"

The picture in the bowl had now grown so distinct that the features of every face could be plainly seen.

As the old witch uttered the exclamation, the combatants fired, and the Mexican was seen to start. Then a dark stream of blood appeared upon his neck.

They fired again, and again did the Mexican start. Then came quickly another shot, the Mexican's weapon flew from his hand, and down upon his knees he was seen to fall, his hands uplifted as if asking to be spared.

"It is he!" cried the old witch, "it is he! It is the son of him I hate. See! A coward's blood flows in his veins!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE SILVER DAGGER.

"THANK GOD he is unhurt!"

Such was the exclamation of Nettie Hucklebee as she sunk down upon a chair, and at the same time she covered her face with her hands to shut out the scene of the duel.

"That is all," said Mother Wolf, and passing her hand over the bowl, she caused the picture to disappear.

About that time a light was brought in.

"Is the duel really ended?" Mrs. St. Clare asked.

"It is," the old witch answered. "That coward will not dare carry it further."

"And this man, you think, is a son of the Don Juan Bartolo whom you hate so, eh?"

"Yes, I am sure he is. I have now studied his face, and I can trace his father's features there."

"Ah! Curses upon him! Let him but cross my path, and he dies! I will kill him

as I would kill a snake." And with her face distorted in passion, the old woman looked ten times more horrible than she was wont.

"But, you would not murder him!" Nettie Hucklebee cried.

The old woman laughed—her awful, soul-chilling laugh, and replied:

"It would not be murder, but a just retribution."

"But," said Nettie, "it was not the son who wronged you."

"No matter. The same blood is in his veins."

"And you would punish him for the sins of his father?"

"Ay, I would, and *will*, if chance offers. That blood shall flow!"

"And you should be the very last person to think of defending him. He is a deadly snake in your life's pathway. Even now he is preparing to spring upon you."

"Beware of him; beware, beware!"

"But, mother, since you can warn me of this danger, can you not protect me from it?" Nettie asked.

"No, I can only warn you. I cannot rule the destiny of a single person on earth. I am but human. I am gifted with a mysterious power, 'tis true; but that power, I will confess, I do not myself understand, and I can only exercise it to a certain degree. Were I near you in the time of danger, I could only help you by human means. I could not call superhuman power to my aid."

"The extent of my power, so far as I understand it and can make it conform to my will, you have seen. If I have power any greater than this, then I do not know it, nor how to control it."

"But, I must go. Remember my warning, fair lady." And with a quick turn the old woman opened the door and was gone.

For a moment neither of the two ladies spoke.

Nettie Hucklebee was the first to break the silence, saying:

"What a strange, mysterious creature."

"She is, indeed," Mrs. St. Clare responded. "How I would like to hear her story! I am sure it must be a sorrowful one."

"No doubt it is."

"I am sorry she left us so soon. I intended to question her. There is one thing which I cannot understand."

"And what is that?"

"Why, it is this: Mother Wolf seems to have lost all trace of this man whom she says she hates so heartily, and does not know whether he is living or dead; and with her strange power at her command, I should think she would have kept track of him, particularly as she seems to thirst for revenge."

"True, it does seem strange. Yet, you know she has just confessed to us that she is but human, and does not understand the power she has, and it may be that she cannot make it subservient to her will in all cases."

"That may explain it. Still, I would like to ask her many a question, and some day I shall pay her a visit purposely to do so."

"And when you do, Clara, I want to go with you."

"You shall, of course."

"Oh, by the way! Did you send for John when I asked you to do so?" Nettie asked.

"No. Mother Wolf's sudden coming in made me forget it. Shall I send for him now?"

"Yes, you may, if you will."

Ere Mrs. St. Clare could do so, though, Cibuta John came in, accompanied by Mr. St. Clare.

"Oh!" Nettie cried, as she sprung up to greet her lover. "I am so glad you escaped!"

"You are so glad I escaped, little one!" Cibuta exclaimed. "You are so glad I escaped what?"

"Why, escaped being shot by that Mexican, with whom you fought the duel!"

Cibuta John looked surprised.

"Why, Nettie, you little witch!" he cried; "how did you find out that I have been fighting a duel? Who told you?"

"No one told me, John; I saw it."

"You saw it?"

"Yes."

"Nettie, you are joking."

"No, I am not. Ask Clara."

"It is true," Mrs. St. Clare assured. "We both saw it."

"And where were you? I did not see either of you."

"We have not been out of the house."

"Oh, come—come!" Mr. St. Clare here enjoined. "You must not try to deceive us like this."

"But we are *not* trying to deceive you," Nettie insisted. "We saw the duel, and still we have not been out of the house."

"Then pray explain how you saw it," Cibuta requested. "I am at loss to understand you."

Nettie then went ahead and told of all that had happened; and when she had ended her story, Cibuta John said:

"This is wonderful. There is something in this, and we will take every precaution against danger and surprise that possibly can be taken."

"I wish I had known the Mexican rascal had been up here frightening you, my pet, and I would have dealt with him a little more severely than I did."

"Did you wound him?" Mrs. St. Clare asked.

"Yes—slightly. I clipped off the tip of each ear for him, and also hurt his hand. He is marked for life, and will not be as good-looking as he was before he met me."

"Why did you fight him?" inquired Nettie.

"Because he insulted me, and considered that I was in his path. He declared his intention of making you his bride, my pet, and I thought that I would give him a chance to show what he was made of."

"And did he fall upon his knees to you as we saw him do in the picture?"

"Yes, and I could not understand it very well, either. I believed that he was no coward, and expected that he would fight as long as he could stand; but he gave out all at once. I think I can see how it was now, however."

"Why was it?"

"It was the unconscious spell which Mother Wolf threw over him when she produced his likeness in the bowl. You say her entire thought was centered upon him, and it has cast him under her influence for the time."

"It is a strange event, at any rate," Mr. St. Clare remarked.

"It is, indeed."

"And do you put any confidence in what Mother Wolf said in regard to Nettie's danger?"

"Yes," Cibuta answered, "I do; and, I shall take every precaution to protect her. Forewarned is forearmed, you know."

"Yes, so it is said. And, it is better to be prepared for the danger, even though it should not appear, than *not* to be prepared."

"By the way," said Cibuta John, "we have received notice from Bartolo's attorneys in regard to the claim case, and we have put the whole affair into the hands of lawyer Skynn. He has proved his worth on more occasions than one, and I think he is as good a man as we could get hold of."

"I agree with you there," declared Mr. St. Clare. "He is a much better lawyer than his looks would suggest. No man can be rightly estimated by his appearance. It is very likely that strong drink has been the means of keeping Mr. Skynn at the foot of the ladder, although I think he does not drink now."

"I guess you are right. His looks indicate that he has been quite fond of his cups. At present, though, as you say, I think he takes nothing stronger than his coffee."

"What action are you going to take?" Nettie Hucklebee asked, addressing her lover.

"Well, we are going to fight it out, of course. And my own opinion is that we stand a fair chance to win."

"The postmaster has suggested the idea of having the claim surveyed in order to ascertain whether we are or are not upon this Mexican's ground, and also to learn whether there is any rascality going on; and we will have it done."

"It is possible that this Bartolo may be trying to get hold of more than his claim calls for; or, his idea may be to 'drift' far enough northward to 'take in' this town; and, if either is the case, we are certain to catch him at his game."

"On the other hand, if he is perfectly honest in what he claims, then we must do our best to get the better of him in fair trial."

"We have several good points to start from, and as many good claims to present; and, as I said, I think our chance is good."

"Besides, I understand that a suit for ejectment requires two verdicts; and if such is the case, then our chances are better still."

"At any rate, I, for one, will fight it as long as there is a cent's worth here to fight for."

"Oh! we *must* win!" Mr. St. Clare exclaimed. "We cannot afford to lose! There are a hundred families in the town who do not own a cent's worth besides what they have here, and for this Mexican to win would beggar them all. We *must* win!"

"To be sure we must!" both the ladies insisted.

"Still, even though we should lose," Cibuta John decided, "we would still be in possession, and we would try to force our own terms with this worthy Don."

And thus the conversation ran on, covering the ground at length which has been gone over in the preceding chapters, and speculating upon what the future was likely to bring forth.

All agreed that the present indications foretold exciting times in the near future for the people of Ante-Bar.

Too many conflicting interests were at stake to admit of a quiet settling of the mooted questions of rights. And, above all these, and far more difficult of adjustment were the passions of love, hate and revenge which animated the actors.

After a while Mr. and Mrs. St. Clare retired, leaving Cibuta John alone with the ideal of his heart, and when he bade her good-night and left the house, the hour was quite late.

He went at once to the Dewdrop Inn, and to his room.

Then, after removing his outer garments and his boots, and putting on a dressing-gown, he lighted a cigar and sat down to enjoy a quiet smoke before going to bed.

For some time he sat buried deep in thought, turning over in his mind the events of the day and considering plans of action for the future.

One thing he resolved to do, and that was, to accept the warning of Mother Wolf.

He had not lived for a number of years in Mexico without learning how treacherous the average Mexican is, and he felt that there was every reason for him to keep a sharp lookout for Don Juan Bartolo.

At last he finished his cigar, and was about to put out his light, when of a sudden he heard something drop upon the floor behind him. It was not a heavy object, but it gave forth a clear, metallic ring.

Instantly Cibuta looked around, and there near his feet he saw a silver dagger—a dagger which had just fallen from the wall where he had kept it as a souvenir; and as he picked it up, the familiar inscription met his eye:

"The silver dagger's work is ended,
Blood shall ne'er more stain the brand;
A charm for good 'tis now intended—
Him who keeps it near at hand."

CHAPTER XII.

NATURAL? OR, SUPERNATURAL?

"This is strange," Cibuta John said aloud, as he held the dagger in his hand and gazed at it; "I wonder how it came to fall?" And he glanced up to where it had hung.

There was the hook it had so lately occupied, still in its place, and on the handle of the dagger was the ribbon by which it had been suspended from the hook, still in perfect order.

How the weapon had come to drop from its place, was a mystery.

And, the silver dagger was a mystery in itself.

It had a history; and that history was like a wild romance as the reader of the first book of this series will remember.

Cibuta John examined the hook, then the ribbon on the dagger, and then the dagger itself; but he could not discover the key to the mystery.

What had caused the dagger to fall?

He could not decide.

"It is strange, *very* strange," he muttered.

"I cannot understand it. I— Ah!"

A new discovery caused the exclamation.

He had discovered that the hook, although securely imbedded in the wall, could quite easily be turned; and it occurred to him that perhaps some sudden jar had turned it sufficiently to allow the ribbon to slip off.

At first thought, this looked possible; but, then, he had felt no shock to the house, and he reasoned that it would have required no slight jar to cause the hook to turn.

Then another idea presented itself.

Perhaps, in hanging the weapon up, he had not placed the ribbon over the hook carefully, or had accidentally turned the hook, and— But, he remembered that he *did* hang it up carefully.

Then came still another suggestion, which was no doubt the true solution to the puzzle.

It was this:

Perhaps some servant in the house had taken the dagger down to look at it, and, in putting it back upon the hook again, perhaps in haste, had not hung it there as securely as it had been before, and consequently it had now slipped off.

This looked so reasonable that Cibuta John accepted it as the true explanation of the affair.

Before hanging the dagger up again, Cibuta looked around for something with which to drive the hook a little deeper into the wall to make it more secure, it being but a small one, and his eyes falling upon some lumps of ore which lay upon a shelf near at hand—pieces which he had collected and saved on account of their peculiar shape or richness, he made one of those answer his purpose.

With it he gave the head of the hook three or four light blows, then slipped the ribbon over it and stepping down, dismissed the incident from his mind entirely.

Barely had he turned, though, to execute his first intention of putting out his light, when again he heard the dagger drop to the floor, with its sharp and peculiar ring.

Cibuta John was amazed.

He turned around instantly, half inclined to believe that his ears had deceived him; but no, there upon the floor the silver dagger lay.

Again he picked it up, and again were his eyes drawn to the strange inscription which it bore upon its side.

This time, however, there was apparently no mystery in regard to the cause or manner of its falling.

The ribbon was still attached to its handle, and in the loop of the ribbon was a part of the hook, which was broken.

It had quite evidently been broken by Cibuta himself, when trying to drive it further into the wall with the lump of ore.

"Well," our hero remarked, addressing the dagger, "it is rather strange, my little mystery, that you will not remain where I place you."

"This time, though, I suppose it is I who am to blame. No doubt I broke the hook, by pounding it to make it more secure."

"Where shall I put you now? Let's see— Ah! Here is just the place for you." And he stepped to the other side of the room, where there happened to be another unoccupied hook.

This hook was just above a table upon which Cibuta kept his books, papers, etc., and in order to reach it he had to move the table out of his way.

This was soon done, and in a few moments the silver dagger occupied its new place on its master's wall.

"There, I guess I shall have no further trouble with you," Cibuta thought. But he was mistaken.

He was just in the act of pushing the table back to its place as that thought ran through his mind, and barely had it found birth there when the table struck the wall, giving it a slight jar, and causing the silver dagger to make a sudden turn, slip out of the ribbon by which it had been supported, and fall to the table, point downward.

Cibuta John was not by any means a superstitious man, but in this instance he knew not what to think.

If he had been surprised and amazed before, he was now thunderstruck.

Three times in quick succession the dagger had now fallen from its place, and it was, to say the very least, strange.

Falling point downward as it this time did, it stuck up in the soft wood of which the table was made, pinning beneath it a news-

paper which happened to be lying where it struck.

First of all, Cibuta looked to find the natural explanation of this third freak, and he soon found it, or at least he soon arrived at a conclusion, forming a theory which he was satisfied to accept as the explanation.

By its two previous falls, and the handling consequent to picking it up and putting it in place again, the ribbon around the dagger had become loosened; and the weapon being just a trifle out of balance when hung upon the hook, the jar from the table had caused it to turn; and as soon as it did so, it slipped from the ribbon and fell.

Nor was this all.

Cibuta John picked the dagger up again, and as he did so his attention was drawn to the paragraph in the newspaper into which the point of the weapon had cut.

The article, of which this paragraph was a part, was a short sketch of fiction, and the place where the dagger had passed through the paper perfectly underscored these words:

"—life or death—"

Cibuta read the whole paragraph, but taken as a whole, there was nothing in it. Nor did any other part of it have the power to impress itself upon his mind like those three words.

It was now growing decidedly interesting.

Taking up the paper, Cibuta turned it over to see what was the result upon the other side.

If anything, it was even more startling than the first.

There, underscored in precisely the same manner, was a sentence complete.

It was this:

"Take warning!"

In the other parts of the paper the marked words conveyed no significance whatever.

With the dagger in his hand, Cibuta John sat down to think.

Was this all natural, and the mere result of chance? Or, was there some supernatural influence at work?

He was unable to decide.

He was by no means a superstitious man, as we have said before, but here was something which he could not understand.

He read and re-read the inscription on the side of the dagger, read and re-read the marked words in the paper, and the more he read the more he wondered.

What *could* it mean?

He thought over all he had ever heard concerning the weapon he held in his hand, and all that he *knew* to be true in its history; and its past was so weirdly strange that he was ready to believe almost anything that could be said of it, or anything with which it had aught to do.

For a long time Cibuta sat deeply buried in thought—so long, in fact, that at last his head began to nod and his mind to wander off into that mysterious country called "Dreamland."

Two or three times he partly roused up, but his head would fall forward again, and finally his chin rested upon his breast and he slept.

And, as he slept he dreamed.

He was in a large pavilion, all the sides of which were open to the air, and which was lighted by a hundred fancy paper lanterns, with here and there a lamp and reflector where additional light was necessary.

Nor was he alone. A great crowd of people, ladies and gentlemen, both American and Mexican, were present, and it seemed to be a grand occasion.

Sweet waltz-music filled the air, and happy, smiling faces were seen on every hand.

He recognized the place at once.

It was the very pavilion that had been erected at Ante-Bar for the coming great event—the wedding.

This he thought in his dream, a fancy within a fancy—as it were.

Then came a break in the thread, and then presently another scene followed.

He was still in the pavilion, and standing beside him was his happy, blushing bride, Nettie Hucklebee.

Then came another break, and presently another scene.

It seemed that some great excitement had just ceased, and all was confusion.

He was standing in the midst of a circle of

friends, and his charming bride was clinging to him for protection.

Again a break, and then another shifting of the scene.

Now the excitement and confusion were all over, and joy and gayety ruled the hour.

Music was heard, and the dreamer and his bride were leading the grand march, while all around were hundreds of faces, all smiling and happy.

Suddenly out from the crowd at one side of the room sprung a man, a gleaming revolver in his hand.

It was Don Juan Bartolo.

His eyes gleamed like those of a wild beast, showing that he was beside himself with jealousy and rage.

The dreamer attempted to draw his own weapons, but, horror! he could not move!

The Mexican sprung before him, leveled his revolver and fired.

And then came the strangest part of all. The dreamer could see the bullet, like a ball of fire, coming toward him. Nearer and nearer it came, and directly toward his heart. A cold perspiration seemed to break out upon his brow. He seemed doomed to die.

As the bullet came nearer, though, there came a sudden gleam of light, and there in its path, standing—or hanging—without visible support, was—the silver dagger.

The bullet struck the dagger, glanced aside, and the dreaming man saw that his life had been saved.

Then the scene vanished, and in its stead appeared—in mammoth letters upon a white ground—these words:

—life or death—. “Take warning!”

Cibuta John suddenly roused up, to find that his eyes still rested upon those words in the paper before him.

Had he really been asleep?

“At any rate, my little friend,” he said to the dagger, “I will take warning, and will keep you by me, night and day.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SHANGHAI WANTS MORE FUN.

The following day was one of Ante-Bar's red-letter days.

It was nowise so great a day as was the day of Cibuta John's * trial for murder, but it was an exciting one nevertheless.

The citizens awoke to the fact that there was fun ahead, and every man who could possibly get away from his work, for the forenoon at least, did so.

And there was fun ahead. To use the proper Westernism—You may just bet there was fun ahead!

And what was it?

Well, Jim Jones, the “Shanghai Rooster from Jimtown Lode,” was to be tried for the shooting of Jem Patterson, which, as the reader will remember, was done in Bill Twicker's saloon on the previous evening.

The people expected that this boasting giant would try to run the trial his own way, and that their alcalde would have to take him out of doors and scour his rear buttons in the sand before he could be made to understand that law and order must be maintained.

They had seen enough of the giant to feel sure that he would raise a row if it were at all possible to do so.

It was Cibuta John's custom, each morning, to attend to the duties of his office as alcalde of the town ere he devoted himself to his private business.

He would go down to the Town Hall (Ante-Bar now boasted such an institution) and spend an hour or two there, attending to whatever public business might come before him, and then devote his time to his mining interests. He, like your humble servant, was—if the word will apply—a pluralist. He gathered his shekels from two sources. And, like your humble servant again, he made it a rule never to allow the duties of his one office to interfere with the duties of his other. When he was alcalde of Ante-Bar, and in the alcalde's office, then he was that and nothing more; and when he was attending to his mines—well, then he was something else, and only that.

On this particular morning when he came out of the Dew-drop Inn at his usual hour,

and turned his steps toward his office, he was surprised to see so many people standing around idle.

Ante-Bar was a busy town, and it was not a usual scene.

What surprised him still more, however, was, as soon as he was espied, to hear three cheers and a tiger for “th' Prickly P'ar o' Ante-Bar!”

“What—ho! Citizens!” he cried out, laughingly. “What means all this?”

“Don't ye know?” Bill Twicker queried.

“I must confess that I do not.”

The little affair with the winged giant had entirely slipped Cibuta's mind.

“Why, that 'ar long-legged feller with th' wings is ter be tried fer shootin' Jem Patterson in th' arm last night.”

“Oh! yes. Sure enough!” Cibuta exclaimed. “I had forgotten all about him. Where will the fun come in, though?”

“Why, we reckon as how he'll try to run th' hull biz, an' that you'll kinder set down onto him a leetle.”

“Well, if he attempts to carry on with a high hand, I shall, you may be sure.”

“Bully fer you! Oh! thar'll be fun enough, an' don't ye fergit it!”

“Well,” said Cibuta, “I am going down to the office now, so bring along your rooster and I'll see what is to be done for him. How is Jem's arm?”

Mr. Patterson was right on hand to answer for himself.

“It feels purty sore,” he said, “but I guess it'll soon be all right ag'in.”

“That ain't th' thing, though,” declared Bill. “It might 'a' been a fatal shot, an' we don't want no shootin' o' that kind 'round heur.”

“That is true,” Cibuta agreed. “We want no unnecessary shooting here at all. I will see to the gentleman.”

“All right, we'll fetch th' beauty down fer trial.”

Cibuta John passed on and entered the Town Hall, which was soon filled, and in a few minutes the prisoner was brought in.

“Cock-a-doodle-doo!” he bellowed the moment he entered the door. “Oh! I'm th' great old hump-backed rhi-nossy-ross o' th' great wild West, I am!”

“Cock-a-doodle-doo! Dee-doo, dee-doo!”

“Sixteen men couldn't 'a' brought me in heur if I hadn't wanted ter come,” he yelled; “but I jest thought I'd come down an' look on, anyhow.”

“Good-mornin'!”

“Good-morning, Cupid,” Cibuta John responded; “how did you rest?”

“Bully.”

“That is good. I am glad to hear it.”

“Ye be, eh?”

“Yes, Cupid, I am. I—”

“Now look 'e heur!” the giant cried, and his eyes snapped in anger; “jest don't call me that 'ar name ag'in, ef you please. If ye want ter save this heur burgh from total devastation, don't call me that.”

“Pardon me, Cu— I mean sir,” Cibuta implored. “Not by any act of mine would I bring about such a dire calamity. What do you wish to be called?”

“Call me Jim—Jim Jones.”

“Well, then, Mr. Jim-jim Jones, we—”

“No!” the giant howled. “I said call me Jim! I didn't say nothin' 'bout no Jim-jim, ner Jim-jams!”

“Very well. For the present, then, you want to be Jim. All right, I'll try and bear that in mind.”

“Now, Mr. Jim, you are here as a prisoner, to—”

“Me a pris'ner! Haw, haw, haw! I'd like ter know w'ar ye see it!” And he thrust his thumbs under his belt, straddled his legs, and looked his most ferocious look.

The man's hands were free, but he was unarmed, and directly behind him were half a dozen drawn and leveled revolvers. He was a prisoner in every sense of the word, as much a prisoner as though he bore the fetters and chains.

“I see it just behind you,” Cibuta declared.

The giant turned instantly, and he saw it too.

“I cave,” he muttered. “Go on with th' funeral. You've got th' dead wood on me now, fer sure.”

“Well, Mr. Jim,” Cibuta went on, “you are here as a prisoner to answer to the charge

of having tried to take the life of one of our most worthy and peaceable citizens. What have you to say?”

“I ain't got no lawyer,” the red giant now proclaimed.

“You do not need any,” Cibuta assured him. “This is nothing more than an examination before the town authorities. Had you killed Mr. Patterson, though, the chances are that it would have proved the court of Judge Lynch.”

“Now what do you say?”

“Wal, I say I ain't guilty. I didn't try ter kill th' galoot. I only aimed ter wing him, jest like I did do.”

“Then you are guilty of having shot him, anyhow.”

“Yas; but then I done it in self-defense, don't ye see?”

“That does not hold good, Mr. Jim; it does not hold good at all. You came here in your war-paint, declaring that you were a chief, hungering for fight and thirsting for gore. You wanted it understood that you were the Soaring Buzzard of the Sierras, or something of that kind. You desired to paint this town as red as your own hair and beard.”

“In the first place you called for rum, and when you found you couldn't get any, then you got your 'dander' up. You crowed, tried to fly, wanted to fight the whole town, and made an ass of yourself generally.”

It was plain to be seen that the giant's blood was boiling. He, the fighting terror, the scarred veteran of many a bloody fray, to be called “buzzard,” “ass,” etc. Oh! it was too much!

“Then,” Cibuta continued, “you made inquiries concerning one Giant John, and when you learned that he had been hanged, then you got howling mad, as I am told, and swore eternal vengeance against all Ante-Bar. You whipped out your revolvers and got the drop on the crowd, and then you thought you would have some fun.”

The Shanghai's eyes blazed fire, and his hands twitched nervously.

The mention of his dead-and-gone brother's name only served to anger him the more.

“You thought you would start a dancing-school,” Cibuta went on. “You compelled everybody to dance. You threatened instant death to any and all who refused. You made Mr. Skynn dance until he fell to the floor. Any one would have been fully justified in dropping you with a bullet.”

“One citizen, Mr. Jeremiah Patterson, did try to draw his iron and plug you; but it seems you were a little too quick for him, and—”

“Bet yer life I war too quick fer him!” the winged beauty cried. “I don't 'low no man ter git th' drop on me when I'm thar; an' if I ain't thar, I gen'ly manage to git thar purty soon, you may safely gamble!”

“Oh, I'm th'—”

“There—there!” Cibuta John exclaimed. “We've heard all about that. We know what you are—the Braying Jackass of the bushy jungles; or something like it. We don't care to hear any more about it.”

“Now, what I was about to say, you were too soon for Mr. Patterson and got in your fire first. You did not do any very serious damage, though, and as you say you did not shoot to kill, I will take your word for it. And since you have had quite a lesson in dancing yourself, I am inclined to let you off easy.”

This announcement surprised the giant not a little. What could it mean? He had expected to be pretty roughly dealt with before he got through with it. Could it be possible that this man, the alcalde, was afraid of him after all? A smile played around his mouth at the thought.

“Wal,” he queried, “what d'ye think ye'll do wi' me? D'ye mean ter hang me?”

“Oh, no, Cu—I mean Mr. Jim. Oh, no! We do not intend any such thing,” and Cibuta's tone was most assuring.

“Wal, then, what d'ye mean ter do?”

“I will tell you. We will give your weapons back to you unloaded, and give you just one hour to get something to eat and get out of town, never to come back again.”

“We have no room here for such as you, and the sooner you go the better we shall like it.”

If the giant had been surprised at first, he

* See “Cibuta John,” Half Dime No. 424.

was now doubly surprised. This was no punishment at all!

When Cibuta had declared his intention to let him off easy, the giant had expected that he would receive a grand ducking into the creek, at the very least; and now to find that he was not to be roughly handled at all—why, it fairly took away his breath!

"Surely," he reasoned, "it must be because they are afraid of me."

"Well," Cibuta asked, "do you accept your sentence?"

"No—no!" the giant yelled, as he took off his hat and flung it down on the floor. "Not by a dol-gasted sight I don't! I've kem heur ter stay, an' stay I'm goin' ter, an' don't ye fergit it!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"Oh, I'm th' great old howlin' cyclone from th' great preraroes, I am. I kin lick anything from a cross-eyed tiger to a buffalo bull! Oh, I'm a terror!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

And the crowd was accompanied with a great flopping of wings, while the giant jumped and skipped around, flinging his arms about wildly.

"No, sir-ee! I'm goin' ter stay right heur, I am, an' I can clean out this hull ranch in jest about fourteen seconds—judge, jury an' all. Come! jest give me a chance ter show ye what's in me!"

CHAPTER XIV.

AND THE SHANGHAI GETS IT.

"CUPID, you do not know when you are well off," Cibuta John averred.

"I don't, hey?"

"No, you do not."

"An' what's th' reason I don't?"

"Because, if you did, you would gather yourself up and slope right out of town. We are doing the real white thing by you."

"Ye be, hey? Wal, I don't see it. I kem heur to stay, an' b' gosh I'm goin' ter stay ef it takes th' ha'r off!"

"All right, Cupid, you're your own doctor. Let me warn you, though, that if you are not scarce around here one hour from now, we will ride you out of town on a rail."

"Haw, haw, haw!" the giant laughed. "Wal, I'd like ter see it. Why, whar d'ye s'pose I'd be, an' what would I be a-doin' bout that time?"

"Why, the chances are you would be sitting straddle of the rail and holding fast like grim death," Cibuta retorted.

This reply fairly "brought down the house," and the giant's rage boiled over again.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" he crowed, And he flopped his wings fast and furiously. "Oh! I'm th' real old fire-eater from 'way over, I am," he howled, "an' bear it in mind. I kem heur ter stay, an' stay I will though th' heavens fall! An' what's more, this heur burgh has got ter suffer fer th' takin' off o' my brother, Giant John, an' I'm jest th' chicken ter make ye suffer."

"Moreover an' above, ef ye can't stop a-callin' me out o' my name, I'm goin' ter make ye do it. You hear me!"

"Now, you claim you're doin' th' square thing by me, but I fail to see it. You've got th' drop on me, an' ain't givin' me no fair show at all. Why don't ye come out heur in th' road an' let me git at ye? I'll tell ye why ye don't; it's 'cause ye daresn't!"

"Cupid, you mistake—you err," declared Cibuta. "It is for your own sake that we refrain from allowing our angry passions to rise. We do not want any trouble, and therefore we give you this chance to go away in peace. And you had better take the chance, and go!"

"Thar!" the giant howled. "I knowed it! You're 'fraid o' me! You daresn't fight! You're a coward! You're all a pack o' cowards!"

Cibuta John smiled serenely, and glanced around at his fellow-citizens.

A hundred winks and nods from every quarter urged him to give the giant what he wanted.

"Oh! what a brave old town this is!" the giant continued. "You're all right long ez ye've got th' drap on a feller; but jest come out heur into th' road an' fight me fair an' square, an' then see whar ye'll be. Why, I'll tie ye up in hard knots so fast that ye won't remember what yer name was! Come, you

sickly lookin' milk an' water kids! Come, you babbies! Do come!"

Cibuta still continued to smile.

"Cupid," he said, "you will regret it if we do come, now I assure you."

"Haw, haw, haw!" the man from Jimtown laughed. "Wal, if I do, I do!" he cried. "It's my own funeral, an' if I git th' worst of it I'm willin' ter take it."

"Say, alcalde an' citizens, I'll tell ye what I'll do. I'll take you, alcalde, an' th' best man ye kin pick in th' hull town, an' fight ye both ter wunst. You hear what I say!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"Oh! I'm th'—"

"Yes, yes," Cibuta interrupted, "so we've heard you say. You're the Blowing Blather-skite of the boundless border, or something like that. We know all about you."

The crowd roared with laughter, and the rage of the man from Jimtown knew no bounds.

"Oh! You coward!" he whooped. "You kin talk mighty brave, can't you, wi' half a dozen o' yer pards a-holdin' th' drap on me! You just prance out heur in th' road, though, an' see how quick I'll adjust yer reg'lator fer ye. Come! Do come! You an' th' best man ye kin pick, both ter wunst!"

"Now, Cupid," Cibuta cautioned, "you are biting off more than you can chew. We do not want to have any trouble with you, I assure you. You had better go away peaceably while you are in good order to go. We will give you one hour, as I said, and—"

"Oh! Coward! A fine specimen you are, ain't ye? You're afraid o' me! That's what's th' matter wi' Hanner! You daresn't fight!"

Cibuta John rose up.

Then the crowd knew their fun was coming.

"Cupid," Cibuta said, "the dignity of my office should forbid my going out in the street to fight, but just here I must make an exception. There should be an exception to every rule. There are times when such exception is actually demanded. You are not satisfied to go away in peace, wearing the laurels you have already won; you thirst for more. You shall be satisfied. It shall never be noised abroad that any man ever came to Ante-Bar looking for blood, and did not go away satisfied. You shall have all the fight you want. Before we begin, however, let us have a little understanding."

"Wal, what onderstandin' d'ye want?" the bully growled.

"Why, something like this. If you get the worst of the fight, you are to take yourself off and never come back again."

"An' what ef I don't git th' wu'st of it?"

"In that case you shall stay here at Ante-Bar as long as you desire to stay, and no one will say you nay. You shall do just as you please, so long as you do not go too strong against the laws and regulations."

"I'll do it, b'gosh!" the man from Jimtown howled.

"And you give us your word that you will go away if you get whipped?"

"I will; honest Injun"

"And I give you my word that if you win you shall stay here, under the conditions I have named."

"Gentlemen," to the crowd at large, "you have all heard this bargain?"

"Yes, yes," came the response.

"Very good. Now let us get right down to business. Some of you search the gentleman while I remove my coat, and make sure that he has no concealed weapons about him. Then we will be ready."

This was soon done, and then the giant was conducted out of doors.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" he crowed. "Oh! I'm the reg'l'ar old-time thunderbolt, I am, an' ef I don't show ye somethin', it'll be because—"

"'Cause ye can't!" some one cried out.

"Can't! You jest hold on an' see. Ef I don't make yer heads dizzy, I'll eat my boots."

Cibuta John now came out, having laid aside his coat and hat, and all was soon in readiness for the fray to begin.

The eager crowd quickly formed a circle, and within that circle the two combatants stood.

So far as appearances went, the man from Jimtown looked able to handle two of Cibuta John, and do it with ease, too; but then ap-

pearances are sometimes so deceptive. He, the giant, was fully six feet six in height, and big and bony in proportion, while Cibuta was but very little if any above medium size; but what the latter lacked in height and weight was made up in pluck and skill.

"Well, are you ready?" Cibuta asked, as he advanced.

"Yes, I'm— No! Hol'on! Whar's yer pardner?"

"Where is who?"

"Yer pardner—th' feller who is goin' ter help ye."

"Oh! I am going it alone. I do not need any help, I guess, to get away with you."

"Why, I'll chaw you all up in less'n two seconds, you little bantam," the winged giant cried. "You won't be anything when I git down ter biz. I'm th' Shanghai Rooster from Jimtown Lode, I am, an' I'm a fightin' terror. I kin lick four times my weight in wild—"

"There, there!" Cibuta once more cut him short. "Don't let's hear so much about what you can do; let's see some of it. Come, now, cut in."

"But," the giant protested, "I expected to have some fun. It won't take me two seconds and a half to lay you out, an' then all th' excitement will be over. You'd better git a pardner to help ye, so's to make it interestin'."

"Don't trouble your head about that," Cibuta advised. "You will find it interesting enough, I guess. You will have all the fun you want, and all the excitement, too. Now, are you ready?"

"Well, if ye will have it, why I s'pose it's no funeral o' mine, so here goes! Look out, now, fer I'm comin' fer ye!"

"Cock-a-doodle doo!" And with a loud crow, a great flopping of his wings, a great flourish of his arms and a smile upon his ugly face, the man from Jimtown advanced.

"Biff!"

And then such a howl as went up from that crowd!

Cibuta John had allowed the giant to make the first pass, and then his own arm shot out like a flash of lightning and the man from Jimtown caught the blow right between the eyes. And it caused him to turn a complete backward somerset.

"Whoop-hoorah!"

"Come to time, Susan!"

"What's th' matter, Shanghai?"

"Come, git up!"

"This is no fun at all!" etc., etc., came from the crowd on every side.

As quickly as he could the red giant picked himself up and rushed at it again, blind with rage and smarting with pain.

"Oh! I'll fix yer!" he roared, and he made blow after blow at his opponent; but he could not hit anything more solid than the air.

And the taunting crowd fairly goaded him to madness.

"Whoop her up, rooster!" shouted one.

"Show us what ye kin do!" cried another.

"Git thar, Eli!" yelled a third. And a hundred and one other exclamations were hurled at him.

Presently Cibuta got his man in just the right position again, and once more he sent him to the ground, and this time with almost force enough to have broken every bone in his body.

Another yell from the crowd!

And this time the giant was not so lively in getting up. He evidently realized that he had met his match—and more.

When he did get up he was a sight to behold. His eyes were fast closing up, his clothes were all blood and dirt, and his wings—the pride of his heart—were in a sadly dilapidated condition. He was a total wreck generally. One of the wings was unhinged, and swung about disconsolately behind his back, while the other, although still in its place, had every quill and feather in it broken and twisted out of shape.

Again he advanced upon his antagonist, but now with more care and caution.

But it was of no use.

Cibuta John walked right into him as it were, and gave it to him right and left until the fellow howled for mercy.

"Are you satisfied?" Cibuta asked. And the bully grunted out that he was.

"Had all the fun you want, eh?"

"Yes, an' a blamed sight more, too."
 "Was it interesting enough for you?"
 "Yas, yas. Say no more 'bout it. I'm satisfied, I am, an' I don't want no more."
 "Well I'm glad you are. Now, get yourself ready as soon as you can, and then slope right out of town. And, whenever you feel this uncontrollable passion of greatness coming over you, just think of me."
 "Yes," Bill Twicker added; "jest remember Cibuta John, th' Prickly P'ar o' Ante-Bar."
 "Oh! I'll remember this, you bet I will!" the bully assured, as he prepared to leave town. "I'll remember you, Mr Cyclone John; you bet your life I will!"

CHAPTER XV.

WEDDING BELLS.

AND so incidents and events rolled on at Ante-Bar, and at last came the day of the great "Jubilee."

And a charming day it was.

The sun rose clear and bright, all nature looked her freshest and best, and a cooling breeze from the north made the day as fine a one as the summer had thus far seen.

All Ante-Bar was in a state of great expectation and excitement.

The citizens were abroad at an early hour, and each and every one was determined that this should be a day for history to record.

Every man, woman and child in the town was determined that the "Prickly P'ar's Picnic" should be a success in every way.

As the postmaster remarked:

"Old Ante-Bar, we'd have ye know,
 Is no slouch of a town;
 When we set out ter do a thing,
 We do it right up brown."

Everybody acquiesced in what he said. He uttered their sentiments exactly.

Yes, it was to be a great day.

The veriest tenderfoot could have seen at a glance that something unusual was going on.

It was more quiet than a Sunday.

Groups of men were congregated here and there, and all business was abandoned.

All the mines were idle, and not a sound of pick or shovel was to be heard anywhere.

All the preparations for the great event had been completed, and now the hour was at hand.

The big covered platform which was to be used for dancing as soon as the marriage ceremony was performed, was all in readiness, and only awaited the coming of night to be lighted up.

Many invited guests were already in town, many more were expected, a good band of music had been procured, and all was in readiness.

The forenoon was wholly devoted to games and pastimes for the interest and amusement of the people at large.

Then followed a grand public picnic dinner in the pavilion, and that was a success in every way.

Then in the afternoon followed more games, pastimes, etc., and music and dancing in the pavilion.

Not a single disturbance occurred to mar the enjoyment, and so passed the day away.

We describe it thus briefly because the evening claims our attention, and because to describe the events of the day in full would require much more space than we have at our command.

Let us simply add that when the shades of night began to fall, there was not a single person in all the town who was not willing to vote that the holiday had been a grand success.

Night came on, and a dark one it was. The moon would not rise until a late hour. But, if darkness ruled without, it did not rule within the grand pavilion, which was fairly ablaze with light, it being hung with hundreds of fancy paper lanterns containing wax candles, with here and there a lamp and reflector.

A great many people were present on the floor, but as yet the bridal-party had not appeared.

There was a perfect sea of smiling and happy faces.

Ladies and gentlemen, both American and Mexican, were standing here and there in groups, talking animatedly, and all eager with expectation.

Sweet music filled the air, and caused the impatient guests to long for the ball to begin.

Presently the priest, a good old Mexican *padre*, entered and crossed over to the head of the room, where he stopped, opened the book, and waited.

Then a hush fell over all.

Presently the strains of the "Wedding March" floated out upon the air, sounding and resounding under the arches of the pavilion's roof, and then the whispers ran from lip to lip:

"They are coming! They are coming! Here they are!"

And even as the whispers ran round the place, the bridal party entered and made their way across the floor to where the good *padre* was standing, book in hand.

What a grand-looking couple they were! What a noble-looking man was Cibuta John! How beautiful his blushing bride!

When they stopped before the priest the Wedding March ceased, and its strains died away like echoes of distant harps.

Then the marriage ceremony began.

Scarcely half a dozen words had been repeated, though, when there came the sound of a dozen horses' hoof-strokes, as they approached the pavilion at full speed, and the *padre* paused in surprise.

Right up to the side of the pavilion they rushed, and then half of the riders sprung from their saddles onto the floor.

They were all masked men, and each one was armed to the teeth.

In an instant all was excitement and confusion. Many of the ladies screamed, and some of them fainted away.

What was the object of this sudden and unexpected raid? Who and what were these men?

The masked men did not pause an instant, but rushed at once to where Cibuta and his bride stood, and attempted to seize the girl and carry her away.

But they were foiled.

Cibuta met them with a revolver at full cock, which checked them for a moment, and in that one moment their chance was gone.

A score or more of men were before them in an instant, and then came a hand-to-hand encounter.

Strange as it may seem, not a shot was fired.

Both sides seemed to act in this respect as if by a mutual understanding. And such it was, though the agreement was an unspoken one. In such a crowd, every shot must have proved fatal to some one.

The men of Ante-Bar were determined to capture these bold marauders, and the masked men, when they saw that they were foiled in their attempt to carry off the lovely bride, were equally determined to make good their escape. They all fought like tigers at bay.

Presently the raiders saw a point of advantage, and by a sudden rush, they broke away and made for their horses.

They were hotly pursued, but in a moment they were in their saddles and dashing away like the very wind.

What could it mean?

Few could have answered the question, but among those few were Cibuta John and Nettie Hucklebee. They knew it to be the work of Don Juan Bartolo, their Mexican enemy.

The moment the men were gone the excitement ceased, though for several minutes longer all was confusion.

Cibuta John and his bride were standing in the midst of a circle of friends, and she was clinging to him for protection.

Many were the expressions of sympathy that were showered upon them from every side, and many were the half-questioning expressions of wonder they heard. But they revealed nothing.

Lucky it was, however, that Cibuta had heeded Mother Wolf's warning. Otherwise his fair young bride would have been snatched away from him right at the very altar.

Heeding the old witch's warning, he had posted armed men all around him, and it was fortunate he had done so.

And now he recognized one of the scenes he had beheld in his dream.

Here he stood with Nettie in his arms just as he had seen himself in his dream.

Was further trouble to come? Or, was this all?

He could not answer; but in any event he was not alone. He was well backed.

When the excitement and confusion were all over, then the aged *padre* opened his book again and the service proceeded.

And as it proceeded, what a charming scene it was! How beautiful shone the face of the happy bride beneath her filmy bridal veil of white! How fair she was! It was easy to see that she was marrying for love, and many a murmur of honest admiration ran in whispers around among the guests and the audience.

No fairer bride was ever seen.

But Nettie Hucklebee could not claim all the admiration. The handsome, well formed man at her side came in for a full share. He was handsome—it could not be denied. He was dark, graceful and stately, with broad shoulders, full chest, and magnificently developed limbs. He was of medium height, his figure was supple and athletic, his head was of splendid shape, modeled in bold lines, his features were clear-cut and regular, his eyes were black and bright, a wealth of dark-brown hair rested upon his shoulders, and a gracefully curving mustache shaded his mouth. He— But, he has been described before.

It was a fair picture. Artist never painted nor poet ever sung of a fairer.

Slowly and solemnly the aged priest read aloud the service, and in clear, full voices the answers were given.

And thus, in the midst of a profound silence, the final words were spoken which bound the two lives together as one, and they were pronounced man and wife.

Old Mother Wolf's prophecy had been fulfilled.

Then followed the congratulations, and in turn all the guests, and almost the entire population of the town, shook hands with the happy couple, and wished them every happiness in life.

The fear and excitement of a few minutes before were now entirely outlived, and once more happiness and gaiety ruled the hour.

Then when the congratulations were all offered, and all were in readiness for the opening of the ball, the band struck up a grand march air and the grand march quickly formed.

Cibuta John and his bride—now his bride, in fact—led the march, of course, and hundreds of happy faces all around the room smiled upon them as they passed.

And thus the great programme of this great gala-day was so far successfully carried out, and soon the summer-night's ball in honor of the wedding was at its height.

Ante-Bar had seen some great occasions before, but this was the greatest and grandest of all. Even the country had never seen its equal.

Every expectation of the citizens had been fully realized, and a great deal more. They had been determined to make it a day worthy of being remembered, and they had succeeded.

The postmaster expressed it in rhyme, as follows:

"We've had great days at Ante-Bar,
 As I kin well recall;
 But this, I want ter say, has been
 Th' greatest of 'em all."

And, as usual, the postmaster was right, and his few words told the whole story.

And so, in the midst of all their happiness, Cibuta John and his lovely wife forgot their enemy and his threats, and gave themselves up entirely to the pleasures of the hour.

And so let us leave them.

Our story of the Wedding Bells is told, and we must dip our pen anew.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STOLEN BRIDE.

THE man from Jimtown's jubilee was in every way a success.

It's crowning feature, the wedding, had been performed, and now all within the big pavilion was gaiety and mirth.

The sweet strains of the dance music floated out upon the air, and the constant pass, change and whirl of the merry dancers were like scenes of enchantment.

And, for Ante-Bar, a scene of fairy enchantment.

Some of the Mexican belles, following a

custom of their country, were fairly ablaze with live fireflies, which were stitched upon their dresses and arranged in their hair. Some had them placed in the form of stars, crescents, etc., and the effect was grand. In the whirl of the dance their skirts would gleam and flash, growing brighter and brighter until it seemed that they were bursting into flames.

The dances were of various kinds, some being American, and others Mexican and Spanish, but each one was heartily enjoyed in its turn.

No thoughts of danger had any one, and yet danger was lurking near.

Presently, just as a new figure was being arranged, for the dance, there came a sudden cry of great alarm.

"Fire! Fire!" rung out loud and shrill, and many a cheek grew pale at the word.

"Where?" was eagerly asked.

It was soon apparent where it was, though, for bright flames were seen at the further end of the town shortly after the alarm.

At the first cry, half the people in the pavilion rushed out.

What could be on fire? How had it caught?

Cibuta John urged the men who were near him to go to the fire at once, and told them to put it out if possible, or to save all the property they could if they found the fire beyond control; and they hurried away to obey.

Then Cibuta turned his attention to his bride, who was clinging to him in affright, and almost ready to faint.

The excitement of the day, her attempted abduction, and now this new alarm, were too much for her nerves.

But scarcely had the men rushed away to the fire, that is, the citizens, when a new danger was at hand.

Suddenly out from the crowd at one side of the room sprang a man, and in his hand he held a revolver.

Instantly Cibuta John recognized another scene of his warning and mysterious dream. It had not come about just like he had seen it in the dream, but it was sufficiently like it for him to recognize the scene at once.

The man had a mask over his face, and was disguised in clothes not by any means his own, but Cibuta recognized him immediately.

The tip of each ear plainly showed where his, Cibuta John's bullets had cut them some days previously.

It was Don Juan Bartolo.

Straight upon Cibuta John he rushed, presenting his revolver as he came.

Seeing her husband's danger, Nettie sprang before him and threw her arms about his neck.

She was willing to sacrifice herself to save him.

Had she not done this, Cibuta had a fair chance to draw and defend himself; but she spoiled it all. She clung to him so that he found it impossible to get at his revolvers.

"Now, die!" the Mexican hissed. "You shall never possess this woman; I have sworn it!" And as he uttered the words he took aim and fired.

Cibuta John had barely time to thrust Nettie aside to save her from being struck by the bullet when the shot came.

And the bullet flew true to its mark.

It struck Cibuta John's breast, directly over his heart, and caused him to stagger backward as though mortally wounded.

But, strange as it may at first seem, the bullet had not penetrated.

It had struck the hilt of the silver dagger, which Cibuta now carried with him, and was turned aside, inflicting only a slight scratch-wound upon our hero.

In an instant all was wild confusion.

The moment the shot had been fired, the Mexican sprang forward and seized the bride who was just falling to the floor in a faint, and several men rushing at once to his assistance, she was carried quickly away.

But after them sprang Cibuta John.

The warning of the silver dagger had not been in vain.

Only for it Cibuta John would have received his death-wound, for the bullet would most certainly have gone through his heart.

To describe the dismay and confusion which followed in the pavilion is almost impossible.

The *fete* was now at an end, and where all had been gay a moment before, all was now silence and sadness.

The fire, too, was raging, and as those who had rushed away to fight it knew nothing of what had taken place at the pavilion, the question of pursuit to rescue the bride was for a time impossible.

As quickly as possible, though, the alarm was spread.

The fire proved to be devouring an old stable, which had undoubtedly been set on fire to attract the citizens and thus give the rascally Mexican the chance to carry out his scheme, and it was soon got under control and extinguished without doing damage to any other building.

Then the citizens heard the story of the abduction.

"An' didn't none o' you fellers help Cibuta John any?" asked Bill Twicker of some of the guests who had seen it all. "Did ye 'low that leetle gal ter be carried off 'thout firin' a single shot?" And he looked disgusted.

"Well," one gentleman answered, "it was all done so quickly that no one had time to act. It was done in a moment's time. We were horrified to see your hero shot down, for we certainly believed he had received his death-wound, and before we could recover and take action, all the rest was over."

"An' did Cibuta foller th' p'izen cusses?"

"Yes, as soon as he realized what had been done, he sprung out in hot pursuit."

"An' still none o' you helped him a bit?"

"You mistake, sir," the man responded.

"Several of us sprung out in pursuit, but as we did not know the ground very well, we were soon distanced. We heard one or two pistol-shots, and then followed a great rush of horses' feet, and it was all over."

"An' has no one seen Cibuta since?" Bill queried.

No one had seen him since.

"Wal, pards," Bill declared, "somethin' has got ter be did, an' that mighty sudden, too. Cibuta has either been shot, or else he's gone on th' trail alone, an' we must find out which it are."

"Come, now, pards; every man o' ye that's got a hoss, git him out an' ready!"

A score of men hastened to obey the order at once.

Mr. and Mrs. St. Clare attended to the final closing of the ball, and provided for the guests.

Many of them decided to remain at Ante-Bar all night, and those who had to go away left a servant behind, who was to bring them the news next day concerning the rescue of the bride.

All were most anxious concerning her, and several of the guests who had horses joined the search party, to render whatever service they could.

It was a sad ending to so happy a day.

None save Cibuta John knew positively who was at the bottom of the villainous scheme, but there were several others who could guess pretty correctly.

Among these was Mr. and Mrs. St. Clare.

And they did not hesitate to make their suspicions known to a few of the determined men who were about to take the trail.

"By th' great Saint Peter!" cried Bill Twicker, who was the recognized leader; "if it is that 'ar p'izen Mexican cuss we'll hang him, ez sure ez fate! We'll settle him an' his false claim racket both ter wunst."

"That's jest what we'll do, an' no mistake!" echoed Jem Patterson, who was one of the party, his wounded arm having now quite recovered its strength and usefulness.

Jeff Parsons, Tom Billings, and many others uttered similar threatening exclamations.

"Or else bring him in prisoner," cried Mr. Skynn, the lawyer, "and let me put the law on him! Oh! how I would make him sweat!"

And Jem Patterson's wife, Sally Ann, cautioned her worthy lord and master (?) that if he could not bring "that dear child" back again, *he* need not return, and that settled it.

"We'll bring her," Jem stoutly asserted; "we'll bring her, Sally Ann, or— or bu'st!"

"Fo' de lub ob goodness," old Snowball White, Clara St. Clare's aged negro servant,

cried out, "yo' 'us' fotch de chile back, else dis ole nig's heart clean done break, fo' shua." And honest tears rolled down his face.

And the postmaster, good old Uncle Daniel Derrick, added:

"Yes, pards, be off, an' bring her back
Ere harm can her befall;
An' if ye are successful, then
May Heaven bless ye all."

And his eyes were dim with tears as he spoke.

In truth, it was a great blow to Ante-Bar to have the belle of the town thus rudely snatched from their midst and carried away to what might prove a horrible fate, and few were the hearts that were not full.

"Yes, come!" cried Bill Twicker. "We must be off! Are ye all ready, back there? All right, then—forward!" and the little cavalcade started.

The hour was now growing quite late, and the moon was just rising above the hills and shedding her light down into the valley.

And it was fortunate for the men in pursuit, for the light would enable them to pick up the trail and follow it with much more rapidity than they otherwise could have done.

They swept up the valley at a good speed, passed the big cottonwood tree, which has been mentioned somewhere in the preceding pages, and then along the banks of the creek toward the main stage-trail beyond.

When they at length passed out from the rocky canyon and struck the main trail, they stopped.

Here Bill Twicker dismounted and carefully examined the ground.

"Which way, Bill?" Jeff Parsons asked. "Hev they struck fer Bung-eye Camp?"

"No," Bill answered, after a moment, "they haven't. They've struck fer th' hills, an' we must be off an' after 'em, hot-foot."

And as he spoke he sprang into his saddle, and away they all flew.

For an hour or more they rode on in silence, Bill Twicker riding ahead and carefully watching the trail, for the moonlight was strong enough to enable him to do so.

And then suddenly, and with an oath, the leader cried:

"Halt!"

CHAPTER XVII.

IN HOT PURSUIT.

"WHAT'S th' diffikilty, Bill?" asked Jem Patterson. "Have ye lost th' trail?"

"No," Bill growled, in reply; "I ain't lost it, but I don't know but I'd a-might as well."

"Why, what's th' trouble?"

"Trouble enough, you kin jest bet high on that."

"Wal, what is it? Come!"

"Wal, it's jest this: These heur p'izen critters has parted company, an' some's gone one way an' some's gone t'other."

"Ther deuce ye say!"

"It's so, fer a fact."

"What kin we do now?" queried Tom Billings.

"Wal, we'll have ter split, too, I s'pose, an' foller both trails," Bill replied.

"That's about it," Jem Patterson agreed; "we must be after 'em ez hot ez all hail columbiar; an' whenever we find 'em up to tricks, we must be up to tricks, too. Come! jest divide yer force, Bill, an' let's get on."

"Now don't git yerself into a cast-iron sweat, Jem," Bill enjoined, "but jest try an' keep cool. We don't want ter go off at half-cock on this heur biz, an' I want a little time ter figger on it."

"Wal, figger away, then."

"That's jest what I'm a-tryin' ter do."

"Now, ez I said, some's gone this heur way and some's gone that 'ar; an', th' question is, which party took th' gal?"

"Not a very easy question to answer, I'm thinkin'," observed Jeff Parsons.

"Yer right, it ain't!"

Bill Twicker had dismounted and was carefully examining the ground.

He was an old plainsman, and was right at home in following a trail.

"Boys," he said presently, "some four or five of 'em have turned off heur to th' left, an' ali th' rest hev kept right on. Now, how th' merry old dickens are we ter tell which party th' little rosebud is with?"

No one could tell.

If Bill himself could not answer the query, no one else felt able to do so.

"Wal, I'll tell ye what it are," Bill went on. "Thar's no use in us a-standin' heur an' chinnin' about it, an' that's sure; so we'd best part company ter wunst an' git ter work."

"Now, Jem Patterson, you jest take yer pick o' any five o' these heur boys, an' then foller this heur trail thet strikes off heur to th' left."

"Jest do yer best work, an' ef ye find yer on the trail, rescue that little gal—or die a-tryin'."

"I'll do it, you bet!" Jem declared. And quickly he told off five of the men, who joined him at once.

"All right," said Bill, "an' now be off wi' ye! Thar's no time ter be lost, I kin tell ye. It's all unsartin whar Cibuta John are, an' ef he's been laid out, then th' poor little gal depends on us alone. Ef Cibuta ar' on th' trail, though, thar'll be music in th' air, you bet!"

"You bet thar will!" Jem agreed. And being ready to start, he and his five followers struck out across the low hills toward the mountains some miles away.

The moon was now giving a strong light, as we have said, and it was not very difficult to keep the trail, although it was much slower work than it would have been by daylight.

"Now, pards," said Bill, as soon as Jem and his party were gone, "we'll be off." And remounting his horse he led his men forward.

It was an exciting trail.

The success of their venture must be made certain, and they were just the men for the task.

The bride must be rescued ere harm could come to her, and the trail must not be allowed to grow cool for a moment.

What made Bill Twicker more anxious than all else, was the fact that he did not know where Cibuta John was.

No one had seen him since he had sprung from the pavilion in pursuit of the rascally abductors, and as Bill had seen his horse still in the stable at Ante-Bar, he feared that Cibuta had come to grief.

But, that had nothing to do with his present duty. Whether Cibuta had or had not come to harm, he must press on and rescue the unfortunate bride.

It would have been a great satisfaction to him, though, to have known where the alcalde was at that moment.

For an hour more he and his men pressed forward in silence.

And then again they came to a sudden halt.

"Great ginger!" cried Bill. "If this heur ain't jest th' wu'st old trail I ever tackled. Heur they've parted ag'in!"

"What are they doing that for?" one of the guests of the ball asked.

"Why, ter throw us off th' track in case we took up th' trail ter foller 'em," Bill explained. "But," he added, "they can't do it. Our party is bigger than theirs, an' we kin split jest ez often ez they kin. Oh! we'll make it warm fer 'em, an' don't ye fergit it!"

"Now, Jeff Parsons, you pick out five men, an' then you foller this trail. Don't fail ter overhaul th' p'izen cusses, an' when ye do—Wal, you heard what I said ter Jem Patterson, so you foller suit."

"All right," responded Jeff. "We'll do all that kin be done, pard, an' no mistake. Come along, fellers, let's be off." And he and his men started.

And then again did Bill Twicker and the remainder of his party press forward.

In the mean time, Jem Patterson and his five chosen followers were hard at work.

Instead of the trail leading them to the hills, as they had at first thought it would, it presently turned and directed them toward an open plain some miles away, in which direction, by the way, the main trail tended.

It was plain that all the men of the rascally band were aiming to reach a common center point of rendezvous, and that, as Bill Twicker had said, they had parted company simply to confuse and delay pursuers.

But Jack was proving quite as good as his master at the game.

It was a hot trail, but as the followers had to move so much slower than the leaders, there was really but little chance of their

being able to overtake them until they came to a stop, or reached their destination.

For considerably over an hour they pressed forward, and then, just as they rose upon a small hill which gave them a good view for some distance, Jem suddenly exclaimed:

"Boys, thar they be!" And he pointed ahead to where dark objects could be plainly seen just ascending another hill.

The horsemen came to a halt, and all agreed that Jem was right.

Now, what was to be done?

To increase their speed and press onward was all that could be done, and that course was taken.

"Forward, now, fer all ye're worth!" Jem cried. And away they flew.

They had not proceeded far, though, when they discovered that the party ahead of them had stopped.

"Hello! what kin that mean?" Jem ejaculated. "Hev they seen us, an' are they preparin' to slap it to us when we git thar? Ef that's the'r game, pards, jest git yer old shootin'-irons out in hand an' ready fer use, an' we'll give it to 'em hot an' strong, you bet!"

"You bet we will," was the hearty response; and each man of the party prepared for battle.

They meant business, every one of them.

They ascended the next hill with a rush, and were about to challenge the party ahead when they were suddenly challenged by them.

"Halt!" came the ringing cry. "Halt, or we fire!"

Naturally they drew rein, and Jem Patterson demanded:

"Who be ye?"

"No matter who we be," came the retort. "Who be you?"

"Say, Jeff," Jem exclaimed, "is that you?"

"It are, fer a fact!" cried Jeff Parsons in reply, for he it was, and his was the party which had been seen.

"What on airth are ye a-doin' heur?" Jem asked.

"I might ax th' same question," returned Jeff; "but I know what you are doin' heur. You're follerin' that trail ye set out on over an hour ago."

"Right ye are, Jeff, an' no mistake; but, how is it thet you're a-follerin' it, too?"

"Wal, I'll explain. Th' rascals divided ag'in not fur back thar, an' I has ter take th' trail same as you did. It struck across this heur way, an' I was a-tracin' it right along when all ter wunst th' tracks jest doubled. That is ter say, there kem jest twice ez many ez there was at fu'st."

"The minute I noticed that, I stopped an' went back a few steps; an' then I see whar th' trail I was after struck right into another one. Right heur's th' spot. An' now, your comin' sets it all plain thet this new trail was made by th' men you're after."

"That's jest the size of it, sure," Jem agreed. "Now, let's all push on jest ez lively ez the good Lord will let us." And push on they did.

And so did Bill Twicker, with the men still under his command.

But Bill soon became involved in an unpleasant dilemma.

The trail he was following suddenly came to an abrupt termination on the banks of a rapid little creek.

Bill ordered his men to stand where they were for a moment, and then he alone forded the creek to the opposite side.

But not a sight nor sign of the trail could he find.

Perhaps he did not swear any, but we are inclined to believe that he did. It was provoking and almost enough to have caused a saint to swear.

"Wal, gold-dast my big sister's he Thomas cat!" he howled. "Don't this beat th' merry old hallalooyer? Ef it don't, then may I be eternally chawed by hungry cattymounts."

"Is th' trail lost?" some one in his party asked.

"Lost? Great rip-raps! Would a gold dollar be lost in a pint o' quicksilver?"

"Wal, I reckon it would," the first questioner responded; "but it wouldn't be lost so bad that it couldn't be found, I guess, when it kem ter be properly b'iled down by the mill hands."

"By ginger, Benson," cried Bill, "thar's

sound sense in you ez big ez a hoss! We'll b'ile this heur trail down an' find it ag'in, or bu'st."

"You come over heur wi' me, an' then two more o' you fellers on that side go each way along th' bank, an' th' first feller ter find whar th' trail leaves th' crick kin jest give th' hoot of an owl. D'ye see?"

This was easily understood and obeyed, and Bill himself and the man called Benson proceeded to examine the opposite bank.

The daring marauders had evidently determined to defy pursuit, for it soon became apparent that the trail would not easily be found.

"What luck?" the men on the opposite banks of the creek kept asking each other. And for a long time the answer was simply:

"No luck." To which would be added: "What luck there?" And then the same answer would be returned.

At last, however, about a mile down the stream the owl's cry was heard.

The signal was passed along to the men who had gone in the opposite direction, and then all hastened to the place where the cry had first been uttered.

There was the trail, and it came out of the creek on the same side from which it had entered.

"Dast their p'izen picters!" cried Bill Twicker, "they've made us lose so much time now that we can't overtake 'em!"

Nevertheless he did not hesitate to set out again in hot pursuit, and the nature of the ground now being such that he could follow the trail quite rapidly, he urged his men on at a lively rate of speed.

Half an hour later, though, they all suddenly drew rein, and then they sat and gazed ahead at an exciting scene which had just come into view.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DARING PLAN.

WHEN the bullet from the pistol of Don Juan Bartolo struck Cibuta John in the breast and caused him to stagger backward as though fatally wounded, a shade of horror for an instant crossed his soul.

The pain was so great for the moment that he believed the shot had struck home, and that his hour had come.

An instant later, though, he realized that his life had been saved—miraculously saved—by the silver dagger.

And at the same time he realized that his bride had been rudely torn from his side and carried away.

With a bitter curse upon his lips he drew his revolvers and sprung to the rescue.

Now he saw the whole scheme.

The fire had been started to draw the attention of the crowd and give the villains a chance to carry out their plans.

In his haste Cibuta sprung to that part of the platform where there were no steps, and ere he could help himself he fell to the ground with force enough almost to stun him.

And this accident gave the daring abductors a great start ahead of him.

As quickly as he could, Cibuta sprung to his feet and hurried forward, but ere he could overtake the villains they were mounting their horses and galloping away.

Cibuta was almost in despair.

His own horse was in a stable quite a distance away, and to go for it would be to lose all sight of the marauders.

And, to stay where he was meant nothing less.

What could he do?

He was not standing still by any means, be it understood, but was still rushing toward the spot where the horsemen were mounting and starting.

He longed to fire into their midst, but dared not do so for fear of hitting her whom he loved far better than his own life.

To call for help was useless, too, for ere horsemen could be collected the evil-doers would be miles away.

Suddenly he caught sight of the white garments of his bride, as she was being lifted upon one of the horses, and quick as thought he raised his revolvers and fired.

Knowing where Nettie was at the instant, he could fire without danger to her.

And, his shot took effect.

A loud groan followed, and a shot was fired in return.

The next instant the body of horsemen started, and swept out of the valley at a rapid gait.

Cibuta John did not stop.

He hurried on to the point of their departure, and there, to his great joy, he found a horse.

Upon the ground near it lay a man in the agonies of death.

It was the victim of Cibuta's well-directed fire.

Bending down, Cibuta saw that the man was a Mexican, and that he was in disguise. He wore a large mask of cloth over his face, securely fastened to his broad brimmed sombrero, and over his shoulders he wore a large cloak of the kind peculiar to his country.

No time was to be lost.

Cibuta drew the man aside out of the trail, and quickly relieving him of the articles we have mentioned, he put them on himself.

Then he mounted the horse and started in pursuit. And, knowing the way as well as he did, he was not long in catching up to the main party.

"Who comes?" was called out to him in Spanish as he approached.

"It's only I!" Cibuta answered in the same tongue, and speaking as though in pain.

And he continued on until he joined the party ere he slackened his speed in the least.

"Why, it's Jose!" was the exclamation he heard at once.

"It is no one else," Cibuta assured, at the same time giving vent to a groan, as of pain.

"Why we left you for dead, Jose!" one of the men remarked. "I saw you fall, and I could have sworn you were hard hit. Where did you catch it?"

"In the leg," was Cibuta's reply. "It almost killed me with pain at the first moment, and I tumbled. In a moment, though, it hurt me less, and I managed to mount again and escape. I had no desire to remain there to be hanged."

At this the others laughed.

"You always were an unlucky dog, Jose," one of them remarked, "but you've got plenty of nerve."

"It takes nerve to keep the saddle with a bullet in your leg, let me tell you," Cibuta averred. And he gave another groan as he spoke.

By thus feigning pain he could disguise his voice, and also make a pretty correct guess as to how the man Jose would have acted the part, were he taking it in person.

On the horsemen flew, out of the rocky canyon and on to the main trail, and then on toward the hills lying away to the north of them.

For several miles they continued straight ahead, and then their leader called a halt.

"Four or five of you," he ordered, "bear off to the left for a mile or so, and then strike for the place we're aiming for. This moonlight is growing strong, and we must give as much trouble as possible to any one who may set out to trail us. It would never do to lose our prize now, after all the risk we have run to get her."

The four or five men were quickly picked out, and then away they went, taking no care to conceal their trail whatever.

Cibuta longed for some way of marking the trail he was on, in order to guide his friends, who he knew would surely come on in hot pursuit, but he could find no way to do so. He had nothing to drop to guide them, and even if he had, he would have been afraid of detection.

To be discovered would have ruined all.

He could as yet form no definite plan of action, but he was determined to keep his bride in sight until chance offered to rescue her.

Poor Nettie had long since regained her consciousness, and begged most piteously to be taken back to Ante-Bar and her friends, but no one paid any attention to her.

The man upon whose horse she sat was, as Cibuta John believed, Don Juan Bartolo himself, but he did not make his identity known to her.

All the men, like Cibuta, wore disguises, which they did not care to remove.

They did not intend to allow their captive to see their faces if they could help it.

If the man upon whose horse Nettie sat was the rascally Don, then he was not the captain of the horsemen, for their leader was a man of larger build than he, and evidently older. Moreover, he—the leader—was frequently addressed as "Captain Pedro," which proved that he was under no control of the Don, unless now acting in his service for pay.

This was probably the true state of affairs, as Cibuta thought. And he set the worthy captain and his band down as a gang of Mexican horse-thieves and cut-throats.

And he was not far out of the way in his guess, for such they were.

Several miles more were left behind, and then another halt was made and another party of four detached to take a circuitous route to add more confusion to the trail.

This was soon done, and then the main body swept onward again as before.

Cibuta now saw that instead of keeping on toward the hills, the horsemen were directing themselves toward an open plain of some extent which lay some miles away.

Our hero could as yet form no plan of action. It was plain that he could not rescue his wife by force, and therefore he must await a chance to bring stratagem to his aid.

Would his chance ever come?

In a short time the band came to a creek, and here they tried to make it impossible for any one to follow their trail further.

They held a short consultation, and then all entered the stream and began to move downward, keeping their horses well in the middle where the water ran swiftest, so that by no possible chance could their tracks be seen.

Nor did they continue on in this way for a short distance only. When they finally emerged it was at a point fully a mile away from where they had entered the water.

During the walk down the bed of the creek, Cibuta John learned something greatly to his advantage.

He learned the destination toward which the band was moving.

Some miles out upon the plain we have mentioned was a grove of cottonwood trees, and in the midst of the grove stood an old house.

It was one that was deserted, and was often made the stopping-place of hunting parties, and oftener of parties of no good repute.

It had the reputation of being haunted, but it was evidently not haunted by anything worse than the outlaws who frequently held high carnival within its walls.

And it was to this old house that Cibuta John's bride was being carried.

When he learned this a plan of action entered Cibuta's head at once, and he resolved to put it to the test.

In fact, no other way was open to him.

It was a daring scheme, and a risky one; but it was the only chance he saw of getting his bride out of the hands of these daring raiders.

As they all emerged from the creek Cibuta drew rein, and said:

"It's no use, comrades," he declared, "I've got to slacken speed. My leg pains me so I can't keep up with you. Never mind me, though, for I'll come on at a slower pace, and will get there sometime."

"Too bad, Jose," was the response, "but still it's not so bad as it might have been."

"Oh! no," Cibuta agreed. "I'm worth a dozen dead men yet."

"Do you want one of the boys to stay back with you?" the leader of the band asked.

"No, never mind that," was the reply.

"No need of it. I'm all right, and will soon be with you again."

"Very well then," and giving the word, the captain and his band were off again like the wind.

Cibuta followed at a walk until the others were out of sight, and then turning off from the trail he dashed away as swiftly as the horse he rode could carry him.

And the horse proved to be a good one.

Cibuta had been over the country, thereabouts several times before, and he knew it well.

He had an object now in view, and this knowledge of the country stood him in good stead.

He urged his horse forward at its best

speed, and as he rode he threw aside the dead Mexican's cape, mask and sombrero, in order to be free for action when the time for action came.

For half an hour or longer he rode thus, and then he once more changed his course and headed straight for a grove of timber which could now be seen some distance away on the open plain, or *llano*, as it is there as properly called.

And this grove was the one in the midst of which the said-to-be haunted adobe house was situated.

It was the destination toward which his bride was being borne.

And Cibuta John's plans may now be understood.

He was putting forth every effort to reach the grove ahead of the outlaws, and then, by taking them by surprise he intended to risk all in an attempt to rescue his wife from their hands.

He worked around so as to approach the grove from the southward, and as he neared it he used more caution, finally reducing his speed to a walk.

And at that gait he entered the deep shadows of the trees, and soon learned that he was the only person there. He had arrived in good time.

CHAPTER XIX

A RIDE FOR LIFE.

As soon as Cibuta John had entered the grove of cottonwoods, he dismounted, and, after assuring himself that he was the only person there, he led his horse around to a spring and allowed it to drink.

This done, he then crossed the grove to its northern side, and there he awaited the coming of his foes.

He was about to take a great risk.

There was seemingly but one chance in ten in his favor, but he must risk all or lose all.

As to fear—he knew not the meaning of the word.

He had taken his station near the main trail to and from the grove, and while allowing his horse to feed upon the grass under the trees, he kept his eyes constantly fixed upon the plain beyond.

And he had not long to wait.

If he had ridden at high speed he had also taken the longest route, and he had not been a great while in the grove when he saw the outlaws approaching.

"Now for it," he muttered, and after looking well to his horse and his saddle, he mounted, drew his revolvers, and prepared for business.

The band of horsemen came on at a gallop, but as they drew near they slackened their speed, and finally approached at a walk.

Cibuta John was well back under the shadow of the trees, and could not be seen.

He could see his foes, however, and he noted their positions carefully.

The horseman who carried the stolen bride rode near the center of the cavalcade, the very worst position he could have held for the success of Cibuta's undertaking.

Cibuta wished he had been at one side or ahead, instead, but as he was not, the best must be made of it as it was.

The trail narrowed where it entered the grove, and as the first of the riders passed under the shade they did so by twos, or singly.

This helped matters some, and Cibuta gathered his reins tightly in his hand and prepared for the attack.

He wished the horse he sat upon were his own, for then he would know just what to depend on; but, since it was not, he must trust all to luck.

When four or five of the men had passed him, and just as the one who carried his bride was about to follow, then the charge was made.

With a wild, unearthly whoop, a shot from his revolver, and a single bound, Cibuta was in their midst.

His shout had put all the horses to fright, the shot had been fired at the one which carried his bride, causing it to rear and plunge madly; and in the moment of confusion he snatched the girl and was away like a thunderbolt.

"Do not fear, Nettie," he said, in gentle tones; "do not fear; it is I, John. I will rescue you, or we will die together."

A loving pressure of the arms that clung to him was his answer.

And, away they sped.

But the danger was not over, not by any means.

It had only just begun.

Instantly a wild cry arose, and then followed a volley of curses that were terrible to bear.

"A thousand furies!" yelled Captain Pedro.

"Is that a man or is it the devil?"

"He is man and devil both!" cried the man who had so lately held the bride before him on his horse, and who was now dismounted, the horse being dead—or dying. "He is both! He is that Cibuta John, whom men call the Prickly Pear!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed several at once.

"Did not you shoot him at the fandango?"

"I thought I did, but—"

"Of course you did!" Captain Pedro asserted. "Your revolver was not two feet away from his breast when you pulled trigger, and I saw him stagger back. Besides, even if you hadn't killed him, how could he have reached here ahead of us?"

"I tell you it *is* he!" the first speaker protested angrily. "But see! He will escape! After him!"

These exclamations, queries and replies occupied but a moment of time, and the final order to give chase was entirely unnecessary, for already the men were wheeling about to dash out in pursuit.

As to his escaping, they fairly laughed at the idea.

He, a single horseman, and his horse doubly burdened, to escape from a score of them—it was ridiculous.

After him they dashed with a wild whoop and yell, firing their revolvers as they came; but for fear of hitting the girl, they did not aim at the retreating dare-devil who had thus defied them.

Cibuta heard the shots whistling over his head, and he readily understood why they were firing so high.

The men who had been at the rear of the cavalcade were now the foremost in the chase, and the first of them were decidedly too near for safety or comfort.

In answer to the shots, Cibuta John turned partly around in his saddle, raised his revolver in his right hand while with the other he held the reins and supported his bride, and fired.

Instantly the first of those foremost riders reeled from his horse and bit the dust—as it is so concisely expressed; meaning that he fell to rise no more.

Considering the circumstances, it was a wonderful shot.* It was a shot by moonlight, with both the marksman and the object of his fire riding at full speed, the distance not less than fifty or sixty yards, and the marksman at the disadvantage of having to turn partly around in his saddle to shoot, to say nothing about his being hampered by the woman he held before him on his horse.

And it was not a shot by chance, as Cibuta John's marksmanship on another occasion bears witness.

If the bold marauders had at first laughed at the idea of his escaping, they began to look at the matter in sober earnest now.

To see one of their comrades fall from his horse, filled them with rage, and several of their number fired to kill, regardless of the consequences.

And their bullets whistled unpleasantly near to Cibuta John's head.

A moment later, though, Cibuta fired again, and this time both a horse and its rider came to grief, the bullet striking the horse squarely in the breast, causing it to fall and throw the rider away over its head with force enough to kill him.

But this did not by any means check the pursuit.

On the raiders came, and it soon became apparent that several of them were gaining.

Cibuta fired another shot at them, but this time he missed, owing to a blundering step made by his horse just as he pulled the trigger.

His next one told, though, and another of the outlaws was tumbled out of his saddle.

*The author, having heard it said of his works that his heroes are impossible marksmen, would respectfully call attention to the marksmanship of "WHITE BEAVER," "BUFFALO BILL," and others.

This reduced the force by four, counting the one whose horse had been shot under him at the first charge at the cottonwood grove, but still the outlaws came on in overwhelming numbers, and Cibuta John's chances for escape looked slim indeed.

"Stop and surrender, or we will fire to kill!" called out Captain Pedro.

"Come on and take me!" was the defiant response.

These men were all Mexicans, let us here explain, and spoke the language of that country, and Cibuta answered them in the same tongue.

"Will you stop?" Captain Pedro demanded.

"No!" was his answer.

The next moment Cibuta John heard the order:

"Men, fire at the horse and end this race, but take care not to aim too high!"

A rattling volley followed the order instantly, and one of the bullets struck the heel of Cibuta's left boot. At the same time he felt the horse give a sudden jerk, or quiver, and knew that another of the balls had found its bed in the animal's flesh.

This caused Cibuta much uneasiness.

If the horse failed, all was lost.

After a few moments, though, as the animal showed no further signs of pain and no indications of weakening, he concluded that it had only received a scratch, or but a slight flesh wound at most.

"Fire again!" came the order from the captain of the predaceous band.

And again was it obeyed.

This time, however, the effect was nothing. Not one of the shots told.

By this time the foremost one of the pursuers was drawing too near, and Cibuta tried another shot.

And not in vain, for again did horse and rider tumble to the earth, the horse with the bullet in its brain.

And this last shot for a few moments checked the pursuit, giving Cibuta a slight gain in distance.

Reckless outlaws as these men were, they did not relish the manner in which they were being singled out and dropped by the way-side, especially as they were not allowed to shoot to kill in return.

"Keep on, you dogs!" Keep on!" cried Captain Pedro. "What are you laying back for?"

"We're getting sick of it," was the answer. "He will soon pick us all off, if we are not allowed to shoot him. Horses' legs are small marks to shoot at by moonlight, captain. Give us leave to drop him, and we'll do it. The girl is in front of him, and she is not very likely to get hit."

Brief as this has been and is in the writing, the race had now continued for four miles or more, and Captain Pedro saw that to end it he must give his men orders to shoot to kill.

And accordingly that order he gave.

"Forward!" he cried. "Bring that dare-devil to a stop, men, if you kill him and the woman too!"

And plainly did Cibuta John and Nettie hear the words.

"Do not be afraid, my pet," said Cibuta, encouragingly. "We are not dead yet, and as long as there is life there is hope. We may get out of this all right."

"But, you do not hope to continue on to Ante-Bar at this speed, do you?" Nettie inquired.

"Of course not," was the reply. "I am trying to reach a certain place I know of, a cave in one of yonder hills, and once there we will fight it out. I can hold the cave against all odds until we are rescued, unless they hold us so long that we shall starve, and I have no fear of that."

"Pray, then, put forth every effort to reach that cave." And then again Nettie became silent, and simply clung to the man she loved, in all faith that he could save her.

But the cave which Cibuta had mentioned, he was not destined to reach.

On behind thundered the now thoroughly enraged outlaws, gaining ground every moment, and every moment Cibuta expected them to fire.

He urged his now panting horse to its greatest speed, but it was plain to be seen that its race was nearly done.

One short half-mile further, and he would be, for the time, safe.

But that half-mile his tired horse could not go.

And then at last came the expected volley, and the race was ended.

The outlaws were now too near to miss, and horse and rider both were hit—Cibuta John squarely in the back.

CHAPTER XX.

MYSTERY.

WHAT had caused Bill Twicker and his men to draw rein and stop so suddenly was the sound of firearms.

And as they looked in the direction whence the sound came, the exciting scene which burst upon them was, first, a single horseman riding at breakneck speed, with some white object before him on his horse; and second, a score or more of horsemen close upon the first in hot pursuit.

It was an exciting scene.

"Who kin it be?" one of Bill's men queried.

"Who kin it be!" Bill repeated. "I'll tell ye who it kin be, pard, an' who I think it are. It's Cibuta John, fer ducats, an' he's got th' leetle rosebud with him, too!"

"Oh, I can't believe it!" exclaimed another. "How could one man have rescued her from so many? It is impossible!"

This speaker was one of the guests of the wedding ball, a wealthy Spanish-American from Santa Fe.

"Nothin' is onpossible fer Cibuta John," Bill promptly asserted. "He is a hull team, Cibuta is, an' no mistake. Why, stranger, ef you war to tell me thet Cibuta John had made a raid an' cleaned out a hull town of born prize-fighters, I'd believe ye. I'd take it fer gospel fact, sure!"

"But, boys, forward! Them 'ar cusses is a-pressin' mighty hard, an' whether that feller is Cibuta or not, he needs help—an' he needs it *bad*."

"Forward!"

And forward they went with a will.

Straight toward them the fugitive horseman rode, and ere long he was seen to turn and fire at his pursuers.

Down the foremost horse went, and its rider with it.

"Hooray!" cried Bill Twicker. "Look 'e thar! Say it ain't Cibuta John, eh? Did ye see that shot? Ef that ain't Cibuta's work I'll eat my boots, an' don't ye fergit it!"

"An' see, boys, he's checked 'em! They knows what's good fer the'r health, an' don't ye fergit *that*!"

"Oh, that's Cibuta John, fast ez a rock!"

And Bill was correct, for Cibuta John it was, as the reader has already concluded.

The check was only of momentary duration, though, for the pursuers soon bounded ahead again, and with greater speed than before.

"By hokey, pards, they means real old business now!" Bill Twicker exclaimed, and he urged his horse on to greater efforts. "That 'ar shot has jest r'iled 'em up fer sartin, an' I'm 'fraid they means ter shoot ter kill."

"Forward, lads, forward! We must git thar, ef it takes th' ha'r off ter do it!"

And all urged their horses on to greater speed.

Nearer and nearer to the lone fugitive they saw his pursuers draw, and they saw that his horse was beginning to fail.

His chances for escape looked very small indeed.

And small they were, in fact.

A few moments more, and then the bright flashes of a volley of shots were seen, and the fleeing horse fell, throwing its double burden to the ground.

Then later came the sound of the reports.

"Heavens! they're lost!" cried the men who were pressing on to the rescue.

"Not by a durn sight!" shouted Bill Twicker. "Keep on, men, keep on, an' give th' pizen devils a dose they won't fergit!"

Flushed with success, the outlaws were now swooping down upon their prey, when suddenly, and for the first time, they beheld the party of horsemen bearing down upon them from the opposite direction.

Instantly they checked their speed, and then came to a stop.

What meant this?

So they mentally questioned.

And they were soon to know, for the rescuers paused not until they had reached and passed the fallen horseman, and then into the outlaws—man and horse—they poured a rain of lead that caused them to wheel about and beat a hasty retreat.

Cibuta John and his bride were saved.

But—heavens! *were* they saved? Was Cibuta living—or dead?

Such was the awful thought that came to those who were the first to dismount and rush to his side.

"He is dead!" cried one.

"No, no!" exclaimed another, "he is alive!"

And the last speaker was right. Cibuta John was not dead, although unconscious.

His had proved a timely rescue.

As to Nettie, his bride—and discourteous of us it is, perhaps, not to have mentioned the lady first—she was safe.

Regardless of himself, Cibuta's only care had been to save her.

But, let us explain.

When the last volley was fired, and Cibuta felt his horse going down under him, he let go the reins, clasped Nettie in his arms, and at the same time loosened his feet from the stirrups so as not to be caught foul.

And even while so doing, he felt a bullet strike him in the back.

For an instant the pain was so great that he almost let his bride fall, but by a great effort he held her fast, and then down the horse went.

Cibuta certainly believed that he was mortally wounded, and even as the horse fell he pressed a kiss upon his wife's upturned face, while in his heart he bade her good-by.

And then, regardless of his own safety, as down they went he held her so that she would not be injured.

Then he knew no more.

He struck the ground heavily, his head came into contact with a stone, and he became unconscious.

But the lady was safe.

Nor had Cibuta saved her that she might again fall into the hands of her cruel abductors.

At the last moment he had caught sight of his friends, as they came on to his aid at full speed, and he knew that although his time had come, she, his maiden bride would be saved.

Otherwise—but we will not attempt to search out his innermost thoughts.

"Oh! he *must* not die!" Nettie now cried. "Tell me—*please* tell me that he will not die!" she implored.

She had already seated herself on the ground, and was holding her husband's head on her lap.

"Please git up, Miss Nettie," said honest Bill Twicker, who now came up, "an' let me find out how bad he is hurted."

"Pray do all you can," the lady suggested, and laying Cibuta's head gently down, she rose and walked away a short distance.

As quickly as possible, then, Bill made an examination, but not a wound could he find, back, front, nor anywhere else, except the "bump" on the head caused by the stone.

And barely had he done, when Cibuta opened his eyes, glanced around at the faces bending over him, and exclaimed:

"Hello, citizens! Am I still with you?"

"That you be, fer a fact," Bill assured him. "Chaw me, though, ef I didn't think ye was a goner, fer sure."

"And so did I," Cibuta acknowledged. "Did you find the wound in my back? How bad—But, Nettie! Where is she?" And forgetful of wound and everything else save her, he sprang to his feet.

"Here I am!" Nettie responded, joyfully, and she sprang forward into his arms.

Cibuta embraced her, and then turning to Bill Twicker he grasped his hand and said:

"Bill, I owe this to you—you and your brave men and followers. I shall not forget it. Men, I thank you, one and all."

"But, about that wound in yer back," said Bill. "I didn't see any signs of any wound there, alcalde. Let's look ag'in." And he wheeled Cibuta around to the moon to see.

Not a sign of a wound could be seen.

"No sir-ee!" Bill declared, emphatically. "Nary a wound thar, alcalde."

"It is strange," said Cibuta, "for I am certain that a bullet hit me."

"Wal, it couldn't 'a' hit ye very hard, then."

"But it did. It almost took my breath at first."

"Wal, all I—"

"What is this?" suddenly asked the lady, interrupting Bill. And as she spoke she stepped forward, took hold of a silken cord that was around Cibuta's neck, and giving it a slight pull, brought to light the—no, not *the*, but *a*—SILVER DAGGER.

Her quick eye had caught its gleam where it was half concealed under Cibuta's arm, where it had caught when he fell.

"*The silver dagger!*" was the general exclamation.

For an instant Cibuta's face paled.

What could this mean?

It was not *his* dagger, for that was lying in his pocket at the moment.

"This dagger is not mine," he declared; "it is not the one you have seen before, my friends." And as he spoke he took it from Nettie's hand.

"Ye say it ain't yourn?"

"It is not mine," Cibuta repeated. "Mine has no cord on it like this, and—But, here is the proof." And thrusting his hand into his breast he drew forth the original silver dagger, and held the two up together.

It was proof that could not be doubted. It was evidence positive.

Where, then, had this second dagger come from?"

Cibuta had no knowledge that it was suspended from his neck by the silken cord—in fact, he had never seen it before in his life.

It was a mystery.

Many were the questions, answers and theories of the men who stood around, but none could explain the puzzle.

"An' you say you never see'd it afore?" Bill Twicker queried.

"I never saw it before."

"An' ye didn't know it war hung 'round yer neck?"

"I did not."

"An' you didn't put it thar?" to the lady.

"No," was the reply, "I did not. I never saw it previously to a moment ago, when you saw me draw it from under John's arm by its silken cord."

"Wal, then, it *are* a mystery, an' I give it up. It's too many fer me!"

"And," said Cibuta John, "this is what saved my life when that bullet struck my back. *It hit the handle of this silver dagger.*"

This was true.

There upon the handle of the dagger was the imprint of a bullet.

"Twice this night," Cibuta continued, "has my life been miraculously saved, and each time by a silver dagger."

"I am no believer in witchcraft," he added, "but there is certainly something about this witch the human mind cannot comprehend."

While he was speaking he again held the two weapons up side by side, and they were found to be precisely alike in every particular. And, most strange to relate, the bullet-mark on the handle of each was in exactly the same spot.

"Say!" some one suddenly cried out. "Is there any reading on the blade of this new one?"

"Sure 'nough!" ejaculated Bill Twicker, now thoroughly excited. "Is thar, Cibuta?"

Cibuta John held the dagger so that the moonlight fell full upon it, and then answered at once:

"Yes, there is."

"Read it! Read it!" was the cry.

"And when this blade shall find its mate,
Who holds the two can laugh at fate—
If he but act a wise man's part,
And wear them crossed above his heart."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CHARM OF THE SILVER DAGGERS.

WHILE Cibuta John was reading the inscription on the blade of the silver dagger so mysteriously found, a deep silence prevailed.

All around him the men listened with deep interest, and almost held their breath in awe.

The history of the first—the original silver dagger was known to most of them, that is to say—its history from the time of its first

appearance at Ante-Bar; and this new one only served to add another chapter to the mystic tale.

All Ante-Bar knew the story by heart, even to the inscriptions which had appeared and disappeared upon and from the blade of the weapon, and those chiming lines ran through their minds as they listened.

It may not be out of place to repeat those lines here.

The first, the original inscription, had been as follows:

"Though this be buried deep from sight,
Yet shall it come again to light;
And when again you see the brand,
Prepare! for death is near at hand!"

And the next, also original—but so finely engraved that it could hardly be seen, was this:

"When five have fallen by this brand—
And five most surely will
Unless it be too soon destroyed—
'Twill work no further ill."

Then, after the death of Judge Hucklebee, who was known to be the fifth victim of the blade, these two legends vanished and another took their place.

This, the third one, ran:

"The silver dagger's work is ended,
Blood shall ne'er more stain the brand;
A charm for good 'tis now intended—
Him who keeps it near to hand."

This was still on the blade.

And now had come to light another dagger, with the legend which closes the last preceding chapter:

"And when this blade shall find its mate,
Who holds the two can laugh at fate—
If he but act a wise man's part,
And wear them crossed above his heart."

Little wonder that the citizens of Ante-Bar listened in awe.

Little wonder that Cibuta John was tempted as he was to hurl the weapons from him as things accursed.

But no.

Twice they had saved his life, and he would keep them, come of it what might.

Such was his decision.

Even for several moments after Cibuta had stopped, the silence continued, and then ere any further speculations could be made, or new theories advanced, it was rudely broken by the thunder of many hoof-strokes.

So interested had all the men been, that they had entirely forgot the outlaws for the time being.

But they suddenly came to realize their presence now.

At the first sound of the heavy tread of the horses, every man of the rescuers grasped his weapons and faced around.

And the sight they beheld was at first a startling one.

Down upon them the outlaws were bearing at full speed, and the gleam of their revolvers could be plainly seen.

After retreating beyond range, they had stopped, held a short parley, and resolved to attack the rescue party and recover their prize.

And this was the charge.

"Stand behind your horses, men!" Cibuta John instantly ordered, "and pour lead into those villains as soon as they come within fair range."

"And you, Nettie," he hurriedly added, catching the lady by the arm and drawing her quickly behind two of the horses which stood side by side; "you remain right here." And pressing a kiss upon her brow, he was about to turn away when she grasped his hand and detained him.

"One moment, John," she said. "Please give me those daggers."

Cibuta quickly complied with her request.

As soon as she received them, Nettie caught hold of Cibuta's coat, and, with quick dexterity, thrust the weapons through the cloth, one over the other, thus crossing them directly over his heart.

Then, by looping the silken cord over their points and hilts, she secured them in their place, saying:

"If there is any truth in that legend you read aloud, you shall be protected by the charm of the silver daggers."

Cibuta would have protested, but at that moment the outlaws were within range, and the men of Ante-Bar opened fire upon them. So, once more cautioning his bride to stand in that particular place, he sprang to the defense.

On the outlaws came, unchecked, and

another volley was fired, this time bringing one of their horses and its rider to the ground.

But still on they came.

And then, Indian fashion, they suddenly spread out in both directions to surround the brave men whom they had at bay.

At this kind of warfare, though, Cibuta John, Bill Twicker, and one or two others of the defenders were right at home.

They made haste and drew their horses around them in a circle, and then awaited the onslaught.

The horse which had served Cibuta so nobly was now dead, and Nettie was directed to sit down behind its carcass on the side that was considered to be the least exposed, which she cheerfully did.

And then the fun began.

The outlaws had now formed a complete circle, and opened their fire.

Two of the defenders' horses were hit, one of them fatally, and one man received a bullet in his leg.

But the outlaws were no less unfortunate, for two of their number bit the dust, while another horse went down. And so strong did the fire continue that they were forced to draw off.

"Thar!" cried Bill Twicker. "Ef ye want any more, ye Greasers, come an' git it!"

"Are they gone?" asked Nettie, as she half arose from her place of safety.

"They have drawn off to a little distance," Cibuta answered, "but I am afraid they will try it again. Do not fear, though, for I guess we can hold out against them as long as they can attack."

"Hello!" Bill Twicker suddenly exclaimed, "what's this heur a-comin'?" and he pointed away toward the south, the direction whence Cibuta had recently come.

"Another band of horsemen!" Cibuta ejaculated, the moment his eye caught the distant object that had attracted Bill's attention.

"It is, ez sure ez fate!" Bill immediately affirmed. "An' now th' question is, be they friends or be they foes?"

A few minutes would decide, for they were seen to be coming at a rapid pace.

At first the outlaws did not see them, in fact they did not see them until they heard their approach, and then they made haste to congregate, not knowing whether they were friends or enemies.

A moment more decided, though, for after a moment's pause the two parties advanced and mingled with each other.

This the men of Ante-Bar saw, and it was not by any means a cheering sight.

It looked like bad work ahead for them.

"We're in a box now, sure's we're born!" Bill Twicker cried out. "We've ter do some tall old fightin', pards, an' nary discount."

And so thought they all.

Even the brave and daring Cibuta John was deeply concerned. Not so much for himself and his fellow townsmen, but for the helpless girl at his side. She must be saved, if all others perished in her defense.

For an instant he stood in deep study, and then he asked:

"Which among you has the best and fleetest horse?"

Three or four laid claim to that honor at once.

Cibuta had some knowledge of their animals, though, and using his own judgment he chose the one he considered the best and asked its owner to mount.

The man obeyed unquestioningly.

Cibuta then turned to his bride and said:

"Nettie, I want you to set out with this man for Ante-Bar at once. Allow me to lift you up before him on his horse."

"But," Nettie began to protest, "you—"

And there she was interrupted.

"Nettie, it is my will that you go," Cibuta said, firmly. "Your safety demands it. Once you are beyond harm, we can fight the better."

"I will go," Nettie said, simply, and she was then lifted upon the horse.

"And you, Smith," Cibuta then said to his chosen man, "ride straight for Ante-Bar. Do not press your horse too hard, but get there as soon as you can."

"All right," the man responded, "an' I'll take th' lady thar safe an' sound, er die a-tryin'."

"I know you will," Cibuta returned, "and I trust you fully. And we will hold these rascally Mexicans at bay as long as we can fire a shot."

A fond pressure of the hand, then, between husband and wife, and Nettie was borne rapidly away.

Cibuta then chose another horse, and with its owner's consent mounted it, and all the others, who had horses, followed his example.

Those who had none seated themselves upon the ground beside their wounded companion, and, sheltered between the carcasses of the dead horses, proceeded to dress his injured leg.

One—two minutes passed, and then a great shout arose, showing that the outlaws had discovered the trick.

"Come on, now, ye devils!" Bill Twicker yelled in defiance.

And then the men of Ante-Bar all gave a whoop.

Instantly the outlaws spread out in all directions to give chase, and at once did the men of Ante-Bar do the same to intercept them.

Cibuta was the best-mounted of the defenders, and he turned his attention to those of the outlaws who seemed likely to take the lead.

And there were several of them.

Four in particular were in one party, bearing away toward the west in order to get by, and for them Cibuta went like a shot from a gun.

And he headed them off, too.

Being four to one, they did not attempt to avoid him, and when he wheeled he came up to them face to face.

Instantly they began to fire, and a dozen shots rung out in quick succession, but not one took effect.

Cibuta seemed proof against them.

Was it their wild shooting, or was it the charm of the silver daggers?

He had no time then to debate the question.

He reserved his own fire until he was right upon his foes, and then he let them have it right and left.

Two of the outlaws fell at once, each struck by a bullet from Cibuta's self-cockers, and in another second the other two had shared the same fate.

And then away Cibuta dashed to stop another who was now somewhat ahead.

The others were equally busy, and the battle waged hot and furious.

And when it was at its height a loud shout arose, and a third body of horsemen dashed into the arena.

These proved to be none others than Jem Patterson and Jeff Parsons, with the men under their command.

They had followed their trail to the cottonwood grove, and thence to the scene of the conflict.

And their arrival turned the tide of the battle upon the outlaws so decidedly that they wheeled and dashed away to the east and south, leaving their dead and dying upon the field.

And they were not a few.

The dead numbered six or seven, and the wounded about half as many more.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SAFE RETURN.

AND then such a cheer as went up from the throats of the men of Ante-Bar!

What a glorious wind-up they considered it for the "Prickly P'ar's Great Jubilee!"

Their victory was complete.

"Three cheers fer th' Prickly P'ar!" they yelled. "Th' Prickly P'ar o' Ante-Bar!"

And they were given.

"An' three cheers more fer th' Prickly P'ar's Picnic!"

And again did the welkin ring.

"An' three more fer Jem Patterson an' Jeff Parsons!"

Once more they were heard.

"An' three cheers fer all of us! 'Rah! rah! ra-a-h!'"

It was not a victory without cost, however.

Three horses had been killed outright, two more wounded, five of the men slightly hurt, and one more quite severely so; but, most fortunately, no one had been killed.

But the wounded men cheered almost as lustily as the sound ones, except the last one

mentioned, perhaps; and even he gave one cheer, despite his pain.

It was indeed a victory for them to be proud of.

Not only had their great first object—the rescue of Cibuta John's bride—been accomplished, but her abductors had been severely chastised.

As soon as the excitement was over, arrangements were begun for the return to the Bar.

The dead outlaws were picked up and laid out together, and then a small pyramid of stones was raised over them to protect them from the ravages of wild beasts until men could be sent on the morrow to bury them.

Then the wounded men were all given horses, and the two or three who were now without animals, mounted behind those who had them.

Several horses had been lost, but three or four had been captured from the outlaws, and so they were not so badly off as they otherwise would have been.

The wounded outlaws, three in number, were also mounted and taken along as prisoners.

And when all was ready the party set out.

Their horses being pretty well tired, they went forward at a walk, and as they rode along they talked over the events of the night.

"I kin tell ye what it be, Cibuta John," Bill Twicker remarked; "when I seen you go fer them 'ar four cusses th' way ye did, I thought ye was a goner, fer sure. How in th' name o' everlastin' did ye git off clear?"

"I do not know, Bill," Cibuta replied, in answer to the question; "unless—" And he pointed to the two silver daggers crossed on his breast.

"Hullo! ye put them ar' things on ye, did ye?"

"No, not I, but Nettie did it. She said if there was any truth in the legend on the dagger, I should be protected."

"Wal, thar is truth in it, pard, an' I'm jest ready ter gamble on it!" Bill declared.

Jem Patterson, Jeff Parsons, and their men were anxious to know all, and the strange occurrence was repeated to them.

"An' ye didn't know th' thing was 'round yer neck at all, eh?" queried Jem.

"No," Cibuta replied, "I did not know it."

And then Jeff put a question.

Jeff had shown considerable detective ability on more occasions than one, and was looked upon as being pretty sharp.

His question was this:

"How did you manage to ride so far in company with those outlaws?"—to drop the peculiar Western way of speaking for the nonce.

"Why," Cibuta answered, "I was in disguise."

"An' how war ye disguised?"

"I was disguised as one of their own men. I dropped one of them just as they were starting, and hastily putting on his sombrero, mask and cloak, I mounted his horse and overtook them."

And then Cibuta guessed the truth.

The silver dagger had been worn by the outlaw, and in taking off his cloak, Cibuta had removed the silken cord too; and when he put the cloak over his own head to put it on, for it was of that peculiar Mexican kind, as we have said, the cord went with it. And later on, when he threw the cloak away, the dagger remained.

"That explains it, then," Jeff declared. And then he explained it as above.

"That is certainly the true explanation of it," Cibuta admitted. "I did not think of it."

"That are jest it, for a fact!" Bill Twicker promptly agreed.

"But, about the charm," some one else observed; "that is the greatest mystery of all."

"Yes," Cibuta again admitted, "that is something we cannot understand."

"An' be ye a-goin' ter wear 'em that 'ar way?" Jem Patterson asked.

"No," was the answer, "I don't think I shall. It looks too much like vain display to suit me. I may wear them in the same manner on the inside of my coat, though, for I certainly begin to believe there is a charm in them."

"Wal, ef it war me," declared Jem, "I

should think it wur jest about *time* ter be lieve it."

"Yes, you are right."

"An' what be ye a-goin' ter do with these heur p'izen critters?" Bill Twicker asked, meaning the wounded prisoners. "Be ye a-goin' ter hang 'em?"

"No," Cibuta replied, "I guess we will not do that. We will hold them, though, and perhaps we can get some information out of them."

"That's a good idee," declared Jeff Parsons. "I shouldn't wonder ef this war th' same gang o' hoss-thieves that's been makin' raids on this part o' th' country fer th' past year or two."

"Very likely it is."

"Did ye hear any names mentioned?"

"Yes; the leader was called Captain Pedro."

"Why, that 'ar is th' same feller they've offered a reward for down in Arizony!"

"Th' deuce it are!" cried half the men in chorus. "Ef we'd a-knowed that we'd a-chased 'em an' potted th' hull caboodle of 'em, sure!"

And the other half echoed:

"Ye kin jest bet yer boots we would!"

"Let us be satisfied with our victory as it is," said Cibuta John. "We have not lost a man, and that is worth far more to us than the reward."

"Yas, that's so," was the response; "we guess ye're right, sheriff."

"An' was it that 'ar Don Juan Bartolo thet stole Miss Nettie—er—I mean Mrs. Cibuta—I mean— Hang it all!" and Tom Billings snapped the exclamation out angrily; "I mean—"

"You mean my bride," said Cibuta, helping him out.

"Yes, of course. Was it thet 'ar p'izen rascal thet stole her from ye at th' ball?"

Nettie Hucklebee had been "Miss Nettie" to all Ante-Bar for so long that the citizens would not find it an easy matter to call her anything else.

"Yes," Cibuta John answered, "he it was. And I have an idea that he will suffer for the outrage before I am through with him, too."

At this they all laughed.

Well they knew what a settlement of accounts with the Prickly Pa'r meant.

Half an hour or more had now gone by, and the horses were getting somewhat refreshed.

Presently Cibuta John said:

"This horse is in pretty good condition again, boys, and if you do not care I guess I will ride on ahead and overtake my bride."

"Go ahead, by all means!" was the unanimous consent.

"Very well, I will. You can come on at your leisure." And giving his horse a slap with his hand, the animal carried him forward at a quick gallop.

The trail was now so broad and plain that it was a very easy matter to follow it, and our hero pressed ahead at good speed.

He crossed the creek which we have before mentioned, and then continued on, heading straight for Ante-Bar—or as straight as the trail would allow.

For an hour more he rode thus, and then at last he came in sight of the man Smith, just as the latter was ascending a small hill at some distance ahead.

Cibuta increased his speed, and soon drew near.

As he did so, however, he suddenly saw Smith slip from his horse and leave Nettie to ride on alone.

What could this mean? he asked himself. But he was soon to know.

Not much further had he gone when he suddenly beheld his man Smith again.

And this time he was playing, for him, decidedly a new role.

Stepping out into the road directly in front of Cibuta, he presented a pair of revolvers, and cried:

"Whoop! Hol' up thar, pard! I wants ter know who ye be afore I let ye pass by heur."

Cibuta stopped, as any one naturally would.

"Why, Smith," he said, "don't you know me?"

"Wal dast my buttons!" the man exclaimed. "Why, ef it ain't th' sheriff hisself!" and quickly he lowered his weapons and put them away. "Blame me ef I took

it ter be you, Cibuta John; not at all I didn't."

"And you were going to plug me, eh?" Cibuta asked, as he now advanced.

"Wal, now I should jest reckon!" the man responded. "No galoot was goin' ahead o' me arter that leetle rosebud o' yourn till I knowed his biz. Ef you hadn't been th' pure quill, you'd 'a' heard from me."

"I thought I made no mistake in choosing you," said Cibuta, "and I guess I didn't."

"Thank 'e fer sayin' so."

"Haven't you some signal arranged, though, to let Nettie know whether to stop or ride on?"

"Wal, I reckon! Ef it war any one meanin' ter harm her, I wur to fire three shots, an' away she would scoot; but ef ye war a friend, then I wur to blow a blow on this heur whistle," and as the man spoke he placed a metal whistle to his lips and blew a long, shrill blast.

A moment later and Nettie came riding back toward them.

"I thought it must be you," she said, as she came up; "but Mr. Smith would have me ride on ahead, and I had to obey."

"And that was quite right, too," Cibuta responded. "Come, now," he added, "and I will take you upon my horse." And riding near, the lady sprung gladly to his arms.

"That are right," said Smith, as he then mounted; "an' as two is company an' three is none, in some cases, I'll loaf 'round heur till th' others comes along."

Cibuta asked him to come right along, but the man refused, and so he and his bride started on and left him there.

And their horses went at no faster gait than a walk, for the time passed by unnoticed by either.

When at last they reached the town, it was just coming daylight; but, early as the hour was, the whole place was astir. Few eyes at Ante-Bar had closed in sleep that night.

The moment Cibuta John and Nettie were seen, such a shout arose as Ante-Bar had never heard before. With one impulse, the whole town burst forth in one glad shout of joy.

Cibuta surrendered his bride to Mrs. St. Clare, and then, as soon as he could escape from the crowd—after giving an account of the rescue, he retired to his room in the Dew drop Inn to snatch a few hours' sleep.

About an hour later the others arrived, and then Ante-Bar heard the story in all its details, and was happy.

And thus ended the greatest day that Ante-Bar had ever seen.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MOTHER WOLF WARNS AGAIN.

AND still more remains to be told.

That forenoon was a very quiet one at Ante-Bar.

For the most part the citizens spent it in sleep, for there were but few who were not in need of rest.

The "Jubilee" was over.

The great day which had been so eagerly looked forward to had come and passed, and now the town must put on its every-day apparel once more.

Along in the afternoon the citizens began to wake up and stir about, and by three o'clock Ante-Bar was all alive.

It had proved an idle day, but that mattered little.

When Cibuta John called at the Hucklebee Mansion—for so the white house was called—he found his charming bride in the very best of health and spirits, and none the worse for her adventure.

Several of the wedding guests were still there, but they were about making preparations to set out for their respective homes.

Finally the last of them departed, and then Cibuta John, Nettie, and Mr. and Mrs. St. Clare sat down for a pleasant chat.

"Well, John," said Mr. St. Clare, "allow me to welcome you home."

Cibuta John had given up his room at the Dew-drop Inn, which fact we will mention—although it would naturally be understood—and henceforth the Hucklebee Mansion would be his home and he its master.

"Thank you," he responded. "For the present, though," he added, "it is no more my home than yours."

"That is only to continue, however, until

my own house is completed," Mr. St. Clare returned.

"And I guess we shall not press you for time on it, eh, Nettie?" And with a laugh Cibuta turned to his pretty bride.

"Indeed, no!" she quickly exclaimed.

And then to her two true friends she added:

"I shall indeed be sorry to have you go, and the longer that new house is delayed in its completion, the better I shall be pleased. You, Clara, have been like a dear sister to me." And she took Mrs. St. Clare's hand in hers.

"Never mind, Nettie," Clara rejoined, "we can console ourselves with the fact that we shall not be far apart, anyhow." And she gave Nettie's hand a fond pressure of love as she spoke.

To explain, Mr. St. Clare was having a house built, and it was only a few steps apart from the Hucklebee Mansion.

"To change the subject," Mr. St. Clare now interposed, "what is the latest in regard to the coming trial at Santa Fe?" addressing Cibuta John. "You, as alcalde of the town," he added, "are naturally supposed to know more about such matters than we of the common herd."

Cibuta smiled.

"Well," he replied, "not much has yet been done."

"Lawyer Skynn has made a trip to Santa Fe to serve a copy of our answer on Jingle & Joy, the plaintiff's attorneys, and has secured certified copies of all the original papers held by that rascal of a Bartolo."

"I said not much has been done, and yet considerable has been done. We are preparing, though, to do a great deal more."

"We have, at a great expense, engaged a party of railroad surveyors to run the tract out for us, and I expect they will arrive here to-night."

"If they do, then to-morrow they will begin work, and we shall soon know just how our case stands."

"We are doing this on the sly, you know."

"These surveyors have been at work around here for some time—at least they have been in the Territory, and their presence here will not arouse suspicion."

"Preparing a surprise for our Mexican friend, eh?"

"You are right. And, if we find him at any crooked game, it will be a surprise he will not relish."

"Do you intend to punish the Don for his outrage of last night?" Cibuta's sister here asked.

"I certainly do," was the reply. "I may put it off until after the trial at Santa Fe, though, for I want to have the satisfaction of beating him there, if we can do it. I think I will wait."

"After the trial, though, then let him look out!"

"I have been thinking," said Mr. St. Clare, "that perhaps you should engage some one to guard your wife until after this affair is fully and finally settled."

"You can not be near her at all times, and we do not know but that another attempt may be made to carry her away."

"Oh!" Nettie quickly exclaimed, "I do not think that will be at all necessary. They would not dare try to abduct me again."

"We do not know that," said Cibuta, "and I have been thinking of the same thing myself."

"Well," remarked Clara St. Clare, "here is Snowball White, my good old slave servant, with nothing to do but amuse the children, and he might 'fill the bill,' as we hear it expressed."

"He is too old," Mr. St. Clare objected.

"Yes," Cibuta agreed, "he is. It requires a man who is young and active, and who can fight if called to do so."

"In fact," he added, "I have already chosen the man, and not only that, but I have engaged him."

"Indeed!" Nettie exclaimed. "May I ask who he is?"

"Certainly. It is Smith, the man who set out to bring you home to Ante-Bar this morning. I have engaged him ostensibly to attend to the yard here, and to make us a little garden, and no one will suspect the truth."

"I think myself that it is a wise precaution," Clara St. Clare coincided. "The

man will always be within call, and some signal can be arranged by which he will know if his help is needed. 'A stitch in time saves eight or nine,' you know, and 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,' and so forth."

At that moment a knock was heard.

Mrs. St. Clare went to the door, and there, to her surprise, she found Mother Wolf, the old witch of the mountain.

"Good-afternoon," the withered crone said. "If Mr. Cibuta John is here, I would like to see him."

"Will you come in, Mother?" Clara asked.

"Yes," the old woman answered; "I will, with pleasure."

And she entered, and was conducted into the room where Cibuta and the others were.

"It is Mother Wolf, John," Clara exclaimed, "and she wants to see you."

"You wish to see me?" Cibuta queried, as he rose from his chair. "Well, please sit down, Mother, and let me know what you desire."

"It is no favor that I desire; you have been too kind to me already; it is to repay a small portion of the debt that I am here. You are in danger, and I have come to warn you. Will you allow me to show you a picture in the magic bowl?"

"Certainly; as many as you will."

"Very well. Please call for a basin or bowl of water."

This was done, and a basin of water was soon brought.

Then the old witch requested that the room should be darkened as much as possible, and as soon as her wish was complied with, she began her strange and weird incantations.

Around and around the table on which the basin rested she walked, making strange gestures with her arms over the basin and uttering her wild and weird chant.

At length she stopped for a moment, took her mysterious little vial from her bosom, and allowed one drop of its contents to fall into the basin.

Instantly arose the dense vapor, and then as that began to clear away, the water became luminous, little by little, until it glowed, as we have before described, like a pot of molten gold.

Then as soon as the vapor was all dissipated, the old witch bade Cibuta step forward to look, at the same time motioning the others back.

Cibuta obeyed, and the moment he did so his face was noticed to turn pale for a single instant, but he immediately recovered his self-command.

And what was it he saw?

It was enough to chill the heart of any man.

Under a tree he saw a great crowd of men, many of them bearing torches, for it was a night scene; and suspended from a limb of the tree by a rope, and that rope around his neck, was—he, CIBUTA JOHN.

Little wonder that his face had paled.

"Have you seen?" the old woman presently asked.

"Yes," Cibuta replied. "I have seen enough."

The witch passed her hand over the basin, and instantly the picture vanished.

"And this is the warning you have come to give me?" Cibuta asked.

"That is the danger," the witch answered.

"To warn, you, I will cause another picture to appear, and this one all may see."

Once more the same mystic performance was gone through, and once more the water in the basin glowed brightly.

And then Mother Wolf motioned for all to come and see.

The two ladies and their husbands advanced and looked into the basin, but at first they saw nothing.

The picture had not yet formed.

Presently it took shape, however, gradually, and then in one voice the four exclaimed:

"The silver daggers!"

Such the picture was.

There in the bottom of the basin, so vividly and distinctly outlined that they looked to be the real metal, the silver daggers were pictured, one lying across the other.

For half a minute, perhaps, the old witch

allowed the picture to remain, and then she waved her hand across the basin as before, and it was gone.

And then she said:

"That is all, and now poor Mother Wolf will go back to her humble cabin. She has done her duty." And she started toward the door.

"Hold on!" Cibuta John exclaimed, and as she turned back he put a piece of money in her hand, and asked:

"When shall I expect to have to meet this danger, Mother?"

"This very night," was the reply. And then the old woman passed out, muttering her thanks for the money as she went.

For a moment no one spoke, and then Nettie asked:

"What was it you saw?" to her husband.

"My pet," he answered, taking her hand in his, "I dare not tell you. If there is any charm in the silver daggers, though, I am protected 'gainst harm; for, see." And throwing open his coat, he displayed the gleaming daggers crossed upon his breast.

"Promise me that you will ever wear them so," Nettie requested.

And Cibuta answered—"I promise."

"Nettie has been telling us about the charmed daggers," Clara St. Clare here remarked. "Will you allow us to see them?"

"Certainly." And Cibuta removed them from his vest and placed them in her hand.

The room was now light again, and as Clara took the daggers Mr. St. Clare requested her to read the inscription on the new one aloud.

Holding it up to the light, the lady complied:

"And when this blade shall find its mate,
Who holds the two can laugh at fate—
If he but act a wise man's part,
And wear them crossed above his heart."

"And the other reads—" Mr. St. Clare queried.

And again Clara read aloud:

"For with this gift the charm must end,
Nor more decrease—nor more extend;
But be to him who wears them so,
A shield to friend—a bane to foe."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SOME FUN AHEAD.

"Change! again!"

Such was the exclamation the four persons uttered.

Even Mr. St. Clare, although he did not remember just what the former inscription on the original dagger had been, knew immediately that this was not it.

"What can it mean?" cried Clara St. Clare. And she made haste to return the daggers to Cibuta John, glad to get them out of her hands.

As Cibuta took them from her, he read the inscriptions once more.

"Yes," he said, "it is changed. This is not what was on the blade twenty-four hours ago."

"What a mystery it is!" exclaimed Nettie.

"I wonder how it is done? What can it mean?"

"The verse on one is really a continuation of the verse on the other," Mr. St. Clare remarked.

"Yes," Cibuta agreed, "so it is. The legend on this last-found blade seemed complete in itself, but now it would look incomplete without the other. It is a deep mystery, and I cannot understand it."

"Do you think it will ever be solved?" queried Nettie.

"I do not know. In the mean time, though, I shall 'act a wise man's part,' and wear them as directed." And as he spoke, Cibuta again arranged the daggers for his breast, crossed, this time to be worn inside of his vest.

He was just about to put them on, when suddenly he held them up to the light and examined them closely.

He had discovered something new.

"What now?" asked his sister, as she, too, advanced to the window, Cibuta having done so.

"Why," he answered, "I believe here is still another legend, part of it on one dagger and part on the other—Yes, it is!"

"Read it! Read it!"

It was very fine, but after a moment Cibuta was able to make it all out, and then out aloud he read the words, which ran as follows:

"And be they in this manner worn,
From morn till night—from night till morn,
The daggers will their vigils keep,
Be he awake—be he asleep."

"A third part!" Mr. St. Clare cried.

"It is, indeed."

"What can it all mean?"

"How is it done?"

"Whence comes the charm?"

All of these and a dozen other exclamations and queries were uttered in as many seconds.

But none found answers.

"Well," said Cibuta, "I am now satisfied that there is some very mysterious power at work, and since this charm seems to have fallen to me, I will wear the daggers night and day." And as he spoke, he attached them to his vest, inside, and made them secure, for the time being, with the silken cord which was still on the handle of one.

And then they all fell to discussing the mysterious affair at length.

In the mean time, down in Bill Twicker's saloon another matter was being discussed.

Bill, the irrepressible, was there, of course; and besides him there was a great crowd, of which Uncle Dan Derrick, Jem Patterson, Jeff Parsons, Tom Billings, lawyer Skynn, and others formed a conspicuous part.

And all were debating the stirring events of the previous day and night, or rather they had been, but just now the postmaster was about to unfold a plan for a little more fun.

Despite his age, Uncle Dan was as wide-awake for fun as a boy of fifteen.

"Wal, Uncle Dan," Bill Twicker questioned, "what is this heur leetle skeem o' yourn?"

And the postmaster answered:

"Wal, pards, I'll tell ye what it are,
I think we people o' th' Bar
Should on Cibuta make a raid,
An' give him a leetle serenade.
At midnight when th' town is still,
Let's one an' all come out,
An' range ourselves before th' house,
An' raise an awful shout.
We'll yawp a dozen times or more,
An' bring Cibuta to th' door;
An' then when we hev got him thar,
We'll ax a speech an' call it squar'."

"Bully fer th' Poic!" cried Bill. "That's jest th' idee! We'll do it, pards, as sure as fate."

"Yes," was echoed, "we will, you bet!"

"An' we'll make it a whoopin' old sary-nade, too!"

"You bet!"

"Uncle Dan is jest th' boy ter call on in th' time o' need, pards, an' don't fergit it."

"He be fer a fact!"

"I'll tell ye what, boys," said Jem Patterson, "s'pose we make a hoss-fiddle an' give him a leetle moozie?"

"What th' merry deuce is a hoss-fiddle?" was quickly asked.

"Don't ye know what a hoss fiddle are?"

"Not a bit."

"Wal, I'll tell ye. It's a box, a big box—th' biggest one ye kin git hold on, an' ef ye can't git one big 'nough ye have ter go ter work an' make one. That's th' fiddle. Then fer a bow ye take a stick o' timber."

"An' how d'ye play it?"

"Play it? Why, ye put lots o' rosin on th' bow—th' stick o' timber, an' lots on th' sides o' th' box; then about four stout fellers gits hold of th' stick, lifts it up on th' box, an' then they jest he-haws it across th' sides from one end to t'other."

"Talk about moozie! Why, ten thousand brayin' jackasses couldn't hold a candle to it!"

"Th' night thet Sally Ann an' me got hitched, a lot o' fellers kem down wi' a hoss-fiddle an' sot it right on th' front porch. An' then they played it."

"Oh! I jest wish ye could 'a' heerd it. It war th' wu'st sound I ever heerd in my life. Why, th' fu'st draw made all th' winders rattle; th' next one started every shingle from th' rafters; th' next one sot 'em to dancin'; th' next one bounced me an' Sally Ann both out o' bed; th' next— But it war jest awful."

"Sally Ann an' me wasn't many minutes in showin' ourselves, you bet!"

"Oh! of all th' groans, an' th' moans; of all th' great he-haw jackass brays; of all th' wild hyena laughs; of all th' infernal sounds ye ever heerd, a hoss-fiddle kin jest tip th' scale ag'in 'em all combined."

"An' you wouldn't be so cussed mean as ter toot sich a bazoo ez that under Cibuta John's winder, would ye?" Jeff Parsons asked.

"Wal, it *would* be kinder rough on him, that's a fact," Jem admitted.

"In course it would," agreed Tom Billings.

"And," said lawyer Skynn, "if it is really as bad as you say it is, Mr. Patterson, it would be bad for the nerves of his bride."

"That's so, that's so," cried Jem; "it won't do at all."

"No, pards," said the postmaster, "it will not do at all, fer we must make a *decent* call; ter go thar wi' a thing like that, would kill our serenade right flat."

"Poic is right," cried Bill Twicker, "an in fact he always are. We'll have th' sarynade, Jem, but no hoss-fiddle, ef ye *please*."

"Yes, I guess it's best ter leave that off th' programme."

"So do I. Cibuta moughtn't take kindly to it, ye know, an' then we'd feel mean ez dirt."

"Oh, no! No hoss-fiddle!"

And so the expressions of the opinion of the crowd were given.

"Wal, what *kin* we do, then?" Jem asked. "We'd orter have a brass band, er somethin' like that."

"Consarn it!" cried Bill, "ef we'd only thort o' this yer skeem afore th' weddin-moozie fellers left town, we could 'a' engaged 'em."

"Sure 'nough!" Jem exclaimed. "Too late now, though."

"Yes, they're gone, an' that's th' end o' that."

"What *kin* we do, then?"

"Wal, the postmaster heur has gi'n us a fair idee. He sez go thar in decent order, raise a big whoop an' hurrah, an' then when Cibuta comes out jest at him fer a leetle speech. Then we'll give him a leetle speech in reply, an' that's 'bout all that's wanted."

"Yes, pards," said Uncle Dan, "I think thet that will do; an' when wi' that much we git through, I'm sure we'll all be satisfied; likewise Cibuta an' his bride."

"Yes, yes! Poic is right!" cried Bill Twicker. "That's jest the idee, an' that's what we'll do. That 'ar hoss-fiddle o' yourn, Jem, kin keep till some other time."

And so it was arranged.

"Bout what hour d'ye think is best, Uncle Dan?" inquired Jem Patterson.

"Wal," the postmaster responded, "I should think about midnight, ez I said before, would be 'bout right."

"Might make it a leetle later, though, an' do no harm," said Jeff Parsons.

"Yes," Bill Twicker agreed, "a leetle later wouldn't do any harm. S'pose we say 'bout half-past twelve?"

"That'll do first-rate."

"All right, then; that settles it. Half-past twelve is th' hour. An' now, feller-citizens one an' all, jest see thet this heur thing don't leak out. Don't say a word about it to any one. An' all you fellers thet's got wives, don't fer th' love o' goodness tell *them*. Ye might ez well post a notice right up on th' town pump—ef we had one—fer a woman can't keep a secret nohow. It's their natur', an' they can't help it."

"Kerrect fer ducats!" echoed Jem Patterson. "Thar's Sally Ann, fer instance. She's jest ez good a body ez ever lived, but she will swop gossip wi' th' neighbors."

"They're born so."

"Yes, fer a fact."

"Well, that is the hour, then?" queried lawyer Skynn.

"Yes, that's to be th' time," replied Bill.

"An', lawyer, I guess we'll have ter git you to make th' address fer us. You've got about as limber a tongue as any man in town. Am I right, feller-citizens?"

"Yes—yes! Skynn's th' man ter fill that bill, every time."

Such was the unanimous cry, and so it was all arranged.

The plans were talked over at great length, but sufficient has been said concerning them here.

Quite a little excitement was expected, but the excitement looked for was as nothing compared with the excitement that was to come.

There was a surprise in store for Ante-Bar.

It was stage-day at Ante-Bar, and as the hour of arrival drew on, the citizens began to congregate at the post-office.

It was the usual stage-day crowd.

Every one acted as though he expected something important to come for him.

It was a curious fact, but on every mail-day the entire population of the town visited the post-office within an hour after the mail arrived, or asked some one else to inquire—those who could not get there in person, whether they expected anything or not.

Every citizen's name was spoken there as regularly as the mail came.

Some who had lived at Ante-Bar four or five years or longer, and in all that time had never received any mail of any kind, were as prompt at the window as those who received letters frequently, and perhaps more so.

When the stage came on this particular day, a party of men got down and out who each carried some sort of bundle or box, some larger and some smaller.

They inquired at once for Mr. John Jones, alcalde of the town.

Cibuta John was right on hand, and he conducted them at once to the hotel—the Dew drop Inn, where he had previously engaged quarters for them.

These men were the railroad surveyors whom Cibuta had engaged to survey the Bartolo claim.

On the morrow the work would commence.

During the evening there was no unusual excitement in town, and at the usual hour, or perhaps a little earlier, the lights were put out.

Soon, however, would come the serenade, to which all looked eagerly forward.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN UNEXPECTED SERENADE.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"Oh! I'm a son-of-a-gun from Buzzard Roost! I'm th' great old hump-backed horned toad o' th' great wild West! I'm th' Shanghai Rooster from Jimtown Lode!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo! Dee-doo-dee-doo!"

"Oh! jest hear me crow! I'm a howlin' terror from th' wilds o' Nowhar! I'm a fighter! I'm a chief! I'm a hull grand army, foot an' dragoon! I kin lick four times my weight in wild-cat, tom-cat, er anything else! I kin whollop any two-legged bein' this side o' th' Mississipp', *except* CYCLONE JOHN O' ANTE-BAR!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo! Three real old howlin' cheers an' a tiger fer Cyclone John! Hip—hip—hurr-r-rah!"

He it was—the giant Shanghai, as large as life and twice as natural.

One of his wings was still unhinged, and flopping behind him very disjointedly, and the feathers of the other were all standing "seventeen ways for Sunday."

And the Shanghai was "howling" drunk. The hour was midnight, and the place was Ante-Bar.

Yes, the bully had ventured to return, but he was not alone.

About fifty of the worst toughs of Bung-eye Camp were with him.

They had come to serenade Cibuta John.

Not a sound had been heard, so silently had these men entered the town, until the blowing bully broke forth as above.

And then the town was awake in a moment.

The citizens had been silently preparing for their own serenade, and were congregated at Bill Twicker's saloon, all ready to march to the Hucklebee mansion when the hour arrived, when they were surprised to hear the brawling shout of the giant from Jimtown.

Out into the street they rushed, and then their surprise was complete.

There before the Hucklebee house they beheld a great crowd of men, many of them carrying torches, and all evidently as drunk as lords.

To say that the citizens were angry, would not express their feelings at all.

They were fighting mad in an instant.

Here was their own serenade knocked higher than a kite, so to express it.

The whole town was awake in a moment, as we just now said; the three cheers which followed the man from Jimtown's declamation being almost loud enough to awaken the dead.

"Wal, I'll be eternally gol bu'sted!" roared Bill Twicker, "ef heur ain't all Bung-eye Camp come ter sarynade Cibuta John! Pard, we're left, an' left *bad*."

"It looks like it, fer a fact!" Jem Patterson agreed at once.

"An' what be we goin' ter do about it?" queried Jeff Parsons. "Shell we wade right into 'em an' clean out th' hull kit an' caboodle of 'em?"

"That's jest what we'd orter do," declared Bill, earnestly. "Ef we do, though, thar'll be blood shed, an' it'll be shed on both sides, too; besides, th' wimmin an' th' kids mought git a stray shot er two."

"No, I guess we'd better let 'em go it, ez long ez they don't go ter pushin' things, but ef they do that—Wal!" And his determined gesture finished the sentence.

"Mebbe they've come wi' good intentions, anyhow," said Jem; "so I guess we'd better let 'em be till we see how it is goin' ter pan out."

"That's a wise plan," Lawyer Skynn added.

"We will let them declare their intentions first."

At that moment an awful sound was heard.

It was a sound which defies description.

Could the croak of a bullfrog, the bray of a jackass and the best effort of a fog-horn be combined in one discordant groan, and that groan increased in volume to the desired pitch, it would perhaps give some idea of what the sound we speak of was.

"A hoss-fiddle, by th' great horn spoon!" cried Jem Patterson.

And then the sound was repeated.

"Oh! Good heavens!" growled Bill Twicker. "That's awful!"

And awful it was.

It fairly made the flesh creep to hear it.

It started a vibration that literally made the windows rattle in every house in the town, and it seemed as though it fairly shook the earth.

The men of Bung-eye Camp had come prepared, and no mistake.

"If *that* don't bring Cibuta John out," declared Lawyer Skynn, "nothing else will."

Half a dozen times, perhaps, the "bow" was drawn across the "fiddle," and then the man from Jimtown shouted again:

"Cock-a-doodle-do!"

"Oh! I'm a-roarin' whirl-wind from th' distant preraries! I'm a wild-eyed hoosier from th' 'way back counties o' Nowhar! I'm th' Shanghai Rooster, I am, an' these heur's my pards. We're fire-eaters, you bet! We've jest kem over heur from Bung-eye, ter do th' squar' white thing by this heur Cyclone John o' yourn; an' we prepose ter do it, too!"

"Three more yawps fer Cyclone John, pardners; 'Rah, 'rah 'rah! TOM CAT!"

"Oh! We're th' stuff, you bet!"

"Cock-a-doodle-do!"

"Oh! I'm th'—"

At that moment, though, he was interrupted.

Cibuta John, hastily dressed, opened the door and stepped out upon the piazza.

"Hullo, strangers!" he exclaimed.

"Hullo! what means all this?"

"Thar he be, fellers, thar he be!" cried the man from Jimtown, pointing to Cibuta. "That's him—th' great roarin' cyclone. Three yawps more fer Cyclone John, th' fu'st an' only man what ever climbed th' Shanghai! Hip—hip—hurr-r-rah!"

And a wild "hurrah" it was.

"But, strangers," Cibuta demanded, "what means all this? Is it a serenade?"

"Bet yer life it is!" the man from Jimtown yelled. "D'ye s'pose we kem clar over heur from Bung-eye fer nothin'? Oh, no! We've kem ter give ye a royal old send-off—a sarynade thet ye kin be proud of!"

"Pards, a leetle more moozie."

Again was the "hoss-fiddle" sounded, and again did windows rattle and teeth clatter.

"Hold on, men!" Cibuta cried, as he descended the steps and came out into the street. "For the love of goodness, hold on! Do you want to resurrect the dead?" And he motioned with both hands to the players to stop, for his voice could not be heard.

At a signal from the Shanghai the "music" ceased, and then Cibuta asked:

"What is it you want?"

"I take it you have just come over here to

have a little fun—to get me out of bed and make me say something, eh? If so, just say what is wanted, and—

"Hello! Cupid, is that you? Glad to see you!" and he held out his hand to the bully.

The man from Jimtown grasped it, and replied:

"Yas, it's me, you bet! I've brought some o' th' lads over ter give ye a leetle sarynade."

"That's right!" cried Cibuta, heartily.

"You're perfectly welcome. And, if you will come with me down to the Pleasant Hour, I will order you a hearty supper. An occasion like this only comes once in a lifetime, you know."

Cibuta believed that these men had not come to Ante-Bar with any good intentions, and he wanted to disarm them by extending a hearty welcome.

His proposition took the Shanghai a little aback, but not for long.

"Oh! no. A thousand times 'bliged to ye," he said; "but we didn't come heur to put ye to any sich trouble ez that."

"No sir-ee!" All we expected was a leetle speech, an' then a good squar' han'-shake all around; that's all.

"Ef thar's any treatin' ter be did, we'll 'tend to that ourselves."

"Very much 'bliged to ye, though, all the same."

"Well," Cibuta declared, "I hardly know what to say to you, men of Bung-eye, except that I thank you for your friendly call, and for your good intentions. I will also add that you are welcome to Ante-Bar at any time, so long as you come in this orderly and peaceable manner. I know you would all enjoy a taste of 'fire-water' at my expense on this occasion, but since liquor is prohibited here, of course it is impossible to treat you. I will give your leader ten dollars, though, with your consent, and then when you return to Bung-eye, you can drink to my health there. Will that do?"

"You bet it will!" was the howl. "Jest hand th' leetle X over, pard, an' we'll soak it in tanglefoot th' minnit we gits home."

"Very well," Cibuta responded, as he produced the money; "who is the leader?"

"I'm th' galoot, Cyclone, I'm th' galoot," cried the man from Jimtown; "so pass it right along heur."

As no one denied this, Cibuta gave him the money.

"Oh! What a royal gall!" muttered Bill Twicker, as he and his party advanced near enough to hear what was said. "Ain't them fellers jest got loads of it!"

"Wal, I should say so!" echoed Jem Patterson. "They jest takes th' cake, they do!"

"Full ez b'iled owls!" declared Jeff Parsons.

"They be, fer a fact."

"Wonder who put it into their heads to come here?"

"Give it up!"

"Must 'a' been th' Shanghai, I guess."

"Yas, er else thet 'ar p'izen Mexican feller—Bartolo."

"Ef it was him," said Bill, instantly, "ye kin look fer trouble. He's th' wu'st p'izen buck I ever see'd. He's mean 'nough ter do anything ye kin mention."

"Mebby, though," said Jem, "they mean well, an' ef so, let's give 'em a good chance ter git away in peace."

"That is a very good plan, sir," lawyer Skynn again agreed.

"Yes," added Bill, "let's leave 'em right alone, an' ef Cibuta John kin git 'em out o' town wi'out kickin' up a row, let 'em go it."

"That's th' idee," declared Tom Billings, "an' that's what Cibuta is a-workin' fer now."

"Yes, that's so."

"And now, gentlemen," Cibuta said, as he stepped back, after having handed the money to the bully, "if that is all, I will retire again."

"Oh! but it ain't quite all!" the man from Jimtown exclaimed. "We wants ter see th' bride! We wants ter git a peep at th' leetle rosebud they says is so purty. Trot her out, Mr. Cyclone, an' let's feast our optics."

"No," Cibuta objected, "I must draw a line right here. It is not a fit hour to demand a lady to present herself, and—"

But a loud shout interrupted him.

"Thar she be!" was the cry, and looking

around, Cibuta beheld Nettie standing on the piazza.

She was clad in a flowing dressing-gown, and was a perfect picture of loveliness and beauty.

"Never mind, John," she said, "it will only be for a moment, and then they will be satisfied."

"Th' gal be right!" the crowd from Bung-eye yelled.

"Three more cheers for th' leetle bride!" cried the Shanghai Rooster. And they were given with a will.

"Thank you, gentlemen, thank you," said Nettie. "Long life and happiness to all of you." And then with a bow she entered the house.

"An' now, Cyclone," cried the man from Jimtown, "you jest give us all a han'-shake, an' then we'll be off."

Cibuta at once began the task, and as the men did not come to him very rapidly, he passed around among them.

He considered that he had got off very easily with such a crowd.

But he was mistaken.

Just as he was about done shaking hands, and was on the very outside of the crowd, he was suddenly seized by a dozen hands and borne away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SHOWER OF FIRE.

"WHOO! hol' on, thar! ye pesky varmints!" cried Bill Twicker, the moment he saw Cibuta so captured. "What d'ye mean?"

"I'll tell ye what we means!" the man from Jimtown answered; "we mean real old biz, right from th' shoulder. We means ter lynch this heur cyclone dandy to th' fu'st tree we comes to, that's what we means, an' don't ye fergit it."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

"Oh! he laid out th' wrong man when he laid out me, you kin jest gamble!"

"He's got ter swing, he has, an' that's settled."

"I'm goin' ter have my revenge fer th' takin' off o' my brother John—'Giant' John, ez he war called."

"Look out, now! Don't ye do no premissious shootin' this way, citizens, fer ye're jest ez likely ter hit yer own man ez ye be ter hit us."

"More'n that, ef you shoot we'll shoot, an' I guess we kin do ez much damage ez you kin, an' mebbly more; fer we've kem prepared fer this leetle job, an' don't ye fergit that."

While thus speaking, the Shanghai and his crowd were retreating, with Cibuta John still their prisoner.

But they were closely followed by the enraged citizens of the bar.

"Wal, dast your buttons!" Bill Twicker shouted. "Ef ye don't let that man go free, we'll drill ye all ez full o' holes ez ye kin hold."

"Drill ahead, citizens," was the retort, "an' we'll try our han's at th' same game."

"Do not fire, citizens," Cibuta John himself now cried; "do not fire unless you see me actually strung up. If they do that, then rush in and give them fits. I have an idee they won't hang me very much, though."

"Oh! ye have got sich an idee, have ye?" the man from Jimtown bawled out. "Wal, let me jest tell ye thet ye'd better be a-sayin' yer prayers, ef ye expect ter go whar th' good citizens go, fer ye're goin' ter start mighty soon, I tell ye."

"Do not trouble yourself about my future welfare, Cupid," was Cibuta's rejoinder, "for there is many a slip between the cup and the lip, you know."

"Yas, we knows; but thar won't be many in your case, you bet! Thar'll be only one slip, an' that'll be a slip-knot around yer neck."

"And that may be a slip not around my neck, but around yours."

"You'll soon see 'bout that, Mr. Cyclone, an' mighty soon, too."

The Bung-eye crowd was all the time rapidly on the move, and now they approached the big cottonwood tree which stood near the creek just out of town.

A moment later and they stopped under it. Then Cibuta John saw that a strong rope

was already dangling from one of its limbs, and that in one end of that rope there was a running noose.

This little scheme had quite evidently been all cut and dried.

The moment the crowd came to a stop, the greater portion of them formed a circle around their prisoner, facing the crowd of citizens on all sides with drawn and leveled weapons.

"Now, citizens," cried the man from Jimtown, "ye see jest how it are. Th' first one o' ye thet makes a hostile move, down he goes, sure!"

"We've come heur ter hang this p'izen cyclone o' yourn, an' we're goin' ter do it!"

"Jest bear that in mind!"

"Were goin' ter do it ef we have ter kill th' half o' ye all ter git it done."

"Now I've guv ye fair an' squar' warnin', an' ef ye ain't got good sense 'nough ter heed it, that ain't my fault. It'll be yer own funeral."

"What shall we do, alcalde?" cried Bill Twicker. "We don't want ter stand heur a-doin' nothin'! You jest say th' word, an' we'll go fer these devils like hot shot, ef we all die a-doin' it."

"No, let them have things their own way, boys," was Cibuta's calm reply. "It will be time enough for you to chip in when you see me actually strung up. Then you may go for them."

"All right," said Bill, and he and his crowd drew back a little, and watched the proceedings with great anxiety.

To have made a charge just then would have proved instant death to many of them, but they did not pause on that account.

They paused because Cibuta John had told them to do so.

And Cibuta, he believed that the charm of the silver daggers would save him, without even a drop of blood being spilled, for he had them crossed upon his breast at that moment.

Otherwise he was unarmed.

Getting up in haste as he had, he had not slipped his revolvers into his pockets, not thinking it necessary, since he only intended to go to the door for a moment.

That mattered not, though, for he was held so tightly that he could not have used his weapons anyhow.

Brave and strong as he was, he was powerless in the hands of such a mob, once they had him secured.

The men from Bung-eye were not long in getting to business.

They quickly adjusted the noose around Cibuta's neck, at the same time making his hands secure behind his back, and then the order was given to string him up.

If Cibuta himself was now powerless, his friends may be considered almost, if not quite, as much so, for even had they at that instant made a charge to the rescue, the Bung-eye crowd could have easily held them at bay long enough to make Cibuta's death certain.

More than that, had they been pressed hard they could have riddled their prisoner's body with bullets in a second's time.

He was indeed in a box, to use the popular term.

Just as the order was given to hang him, a cry was heard in the direction of the Hucklebee mansion, and instantly followed by three or four pistol-shots in quick succession.

What could this mean?

Cibuta John was quick to guess.

"To the rescue, men!" he cried. "This is but a ruse to enable them to steal Nettie, my bride! To the rescue!"

The men of Ante-Bar were quick to obey.

Away they sprung, leaving Cibuta almost deserted. Barely a dozen remained near him.

And then indeed was he left powerless and to his fate.

As the rescuers neared the mansion they heard several more shots, and then suddenly they beheld Nettie flying toward them.

"Save me! save me!" she cried.

A man was following her closely, but ere he had taken a dozen steps more a shot was fired from the opposite direction, and he stumbled and fell forward upon his face.

A moment later and Nettie was safe.

"Dast th' pesky villains!" cried Bill Twicker, "we'll settle wi' 'em fer this heur work, er else my name ain't what it be."

"War they tryin' ter steal ye ag'in, leetle gal?"

"Yes," said Nettie, "and but for that brave man, Smith, they would have succeeded. I believe he has killed at least three of them."

"I had just stepped out upon the piazza to see where John was, when I was seized by four men and borne rapidly away."

"I cried for help at once, and Smith sprung immediately to my rescue."

"But, where is John?"

Could she have seen the faces around her more distinctly, she would have seen most of them turn deathly pale.

As it was, she only knew that the moment the question left her lips she was almost deserted, for nearly all rushed away up the creek toward the point when she beheld the flashing torches of the serenaders.

"What does this mean?" she hurriedly asked of the few who remained near her. "Is John in danger?" And then as no one answered her at once, she added:

"Oh! He is in danger, and you will not tell me! Quick! Follow me to the rescue!" And the brave woman rushed forward.

Her guardsman, Smith, came running up just as she started, calling to her to stop and not run into further danger, but her only answer was a command for him to follow her.

And that he did.

Meanwhile, the men who had Cibuta John in such a foul fix had obeyed their leader's order, and attempted to lynch their prisoner.

Barely had they pulled the rope tight, though, when it suddenly parted, and the three or four who had hold of it fell to the ground all in a heap.

This was a surprise they had not looked for.

In fact, they had taken care to procure a piece of rope which they could depend on, and they knew at once that it must have been tampered with.

With an oath the man from Jimtown quickly examined it, and immediately exclaimed:

"Cut, by th' eternal!"

"Cut?" the others repeated. "Who could 'a' done it?"

"Thar's some p'izen whelp up th' tree thar, *that's* whol!" the giant howled. "Blaze away up thar an' fetch him down!"

Instantly a score of bullets went singing up among the branches, but the result was nothing.

The men were puzzled.

Again the rope was thrown over the limb and made all ready, again was the order given to hoist, and again did it part as before.

Then again did the bullets fly thick and fast up among the leaves and branches of the old cottonwood.

But the result was the same as before—nothing.

Alarmed by the shots, the citizens of the Bar now came rushing upon the scene in great numbers, Nettie, the bride, among them.

The moment she realized her husband's danger she tried to rush to him, but she was held back.

She stormed at this, but the men who held her were firm and would not allow her to rush into new dangers.

"Stan' back, citizens, stan' back!" the man from Jimtown warned. "We means biz, an' ef we have ter fire on ye, *we'll shoot ter kill th' gal!*"

"Stand back, friends, and do not risk a shot!" Cibuta ordered.

And, utterly powerless under the circumstances, the men obeyed.

Once again, then, the rope was tried, thrown over the limb and adjusted, and once again was the order given to pull; and then once again did it part.

No one could understand it.

And then instantly followed another and still greater surprise.

A thousand little streams of fire came pouring down out of the tree, and as they fell they took the form of serpents.

All over the ground they writhed and squirmed, darting hither and thither, and all around through the air they flashed in countless numbers.

Nor were they harmless, for whoever they touched they burned.

They were respecters of neither friend nor

foe, so far as Cibuta John was concerned, but did their work blindly.

But this the men of Bung-eye did not notice, for being directly under the tree, they received them in abundance.

They hesitated for an instant, and then with wild yells of pain and fear they turned and fled.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CIBUTA JOHN'S OATH.

CIBUTA JOHN himself was not long, then, in getting out from under the tree, as may be imagined.

Bill Twicker released his hands at once, and the rope was hurriedly cast off from his neck.

And then Nettie sprung into his arms.

If the Bung-eye Camp crowd was surprised at this sudden shower of fire, no less so were the citizens of Ante-Bar.

It was something entirely unlooked for.

For an instant Cibuta held his bride, and then he turned to the crowd and said:

"Be after those cowardly curs, men of Ante-Bar! You have them at a disadvantage now, while they are so badly frightened, and you can easily run them clear out of town."

"Go for them!"

And the men of Ante-Bar *did* go.

The Jimtown giant and his crowd were about coming to a halt when the charge was made, and they were not prepared for it.

"Sock it to 'em, pardners!" cried Bill Twicker. "Give 'em merry old hail columbiar!" And as he spoke, he blazed away right and left with his revolvers.

And so hard did the men of Ante-Bar press, that the Bung-eye crowd was forced to retreat in haste after delivering a scattering fire, which did but little or no damage.

"Keep it up, pard!" Bill cried. "Sock it to 'em! Warm the'r jackets for 'em!" And the citizens pressed on, sending in a shower of lead that caused more than one of the villains to fall by the wayside.

The rascals fell back up the creek until they reached that point where the valley narrowed, and where large boulders lay scattered around in wild confusion, and there they made a stand.

Sheltering themselves behind the rocks, they began to return shot for shot.

And not without effect.

Several of Ante-Bar's brave men were hit, and poor Tom Billings fell to rise no more.

Fairly maddened at this, the others were about to make a desperate charge, but Bill Twicker ordered them to fall back.

"No use, pards," he said, "fer they kin hold them 'ar rocks ag'in a hull army."

"Git back out o' range as soon's ye kin, an' we'll try 'em in some other way."

Seeing, then, that Bill was right, the men obeyed.

But not without much grumbling and loud howls for revenge.

"Oh!" Bill exclaimed, "ye shell have revenge, pards, an' all ye want; but we can't git it by committin' susancide."

"I'll tell ye how we'll fix 'em, boys, we'll git around 'em an' go fer 'em on both sides ter wunst."

"Ef that don't fix 'em, then my best gal's name wasn't Sal!"

"That's jest th' idee!" agreed Jem Patterson. "We kin git around 'em in about twenty minutes, an' if we don't make 'em sing ki-yi, then ye kin kick me!"

"Well, Jem," said Bill, "you take about half th' men an' git around thar, an' as soon as we hear you go fer 'em, we'll pitch in from this side."

"All right. Come on, boys," and Jem started off, half the crowd following him.

"Now then, pards," said Bill, to those who remained with him, "jest git yer shootin'-irons in order fer biz; an' ef we don't lay out this heur Bung-eye crowd, it'll be mighty queer."

And silently the men prepared for the coming strife.

It was—or at least it should have been a moonlight night, as the previous night had been, but it was very cloudy. And the men from Bung-eye Camp having thrown away their torches, all around in this part of the valley was deep darkness.

Ten minutes—twenty minutes passed, and nothing was heard from Jem Patterson.

"Wonder whar they be?" some one partly exclaimed.

"Give it up," was Bill Twicker's response; "but it's gettin' high time that they was heerd from."

At that instant Jem's voice was heard.

"Hullo, Bill!" he cried, the sound coming from the direction of the boulders.

"Hullo!" was Bill's quick answer. "What's up?"

"They've puckercheed!"

"Th' deuce ye say!"

"Fact, sure's ye live."

And true it was.

Some in the Bung-eye crowd had once been citizens of Ante-Bar, having severed their allegiance when the prohibition liquor law was put into effect, and they knew well the danger of a long delay amid the boulders.

They informed the others that if they remained there they would soon find themselves in a tight place, and so as soon as the Ante-Bar men fell back, they hastened silently away.

By the time Jem Patterson and his followers could get around there, they were out of sight and hearing, and were laying distance behind them as fast as possible.

For one night they had had enough.

Bill Twicker and his men at once advanced, and the two parties again became one.

"Gol dast the'r pictur's!" Bill cried. "They knowed better'n ter stay thar long."

Picking poor Tom Billings's body up, and assisting their wounded, the men returned sadly to town.

Meanwhile, under the big cottonwood tree, the mystery of Cibuta John's wonderful escape from death by hanging, and the mystery of the fiery serpents, were made clear.

Barely had the men started in pursuit of the villainous Bung-eye gang, when a wild, weird and unearthly laugh was heard.

Whence came it?

No one could answer that.

It seemed to come from overhead, and it seemed to come from the ground.

Two or three times it was heard, and then all was made plain.

Out from the hollow of the tree stepped—Mother Wolf! the old witch of the mountain.

"He, he, he! Ho, ho, ho!" she laughed.

"Oh! Mother Wolf knew how to clear them out! Ha, ha, ha!"

"How did you know they would bring me to this particular tree?" Cibuta John asked, recalling to mind the picture he had seen in the old hag's mystic bowl.

"How does Mother Wolf know many a thing?" was the witch's query in reply.

"How does she know that Don Juan Bartolo is fated to die upon that very limb?" And she pointed to the one upon which the rope for Cibuta's neck had so lately hung.

"Do you mean that?" Cibuta John quickly asked.

"I do. It is fated so to be."

"Ah! curse the name! Mother Wolf's arm will not then reach out over the limb from the hollow trunk to cut the rope. Ha, ha, ha! Oh, no!" And again did she laugh in her horrible manner.

"And it was you who saved my life! I shall not forget you, Mother Wolf." And Cibuta took her old and shriveled hand in his as he spoke.

"Thank you, my son, thank you," was the old woman's response. "You and your fairy-like bride have been good to me, and I must repay you if I can."

"But Mother Wolf's days are now numbered, and she cannot serve you long."

"Oh! do not say that!" cried Nettie.

"It is true, my child, true, true. And Mother Wolf has a favor to ask."

"Name it!" Cibuta John cried. "Name it, Mother, and if it is at all possible for me to grant it, I certainly shall do so."

"Well, my son, it is this: I want you to avenge my death, *for I shall be murdered!*"

"Murdered?"

"Yes."

"And can we not save you? Is there nothing that can be done to change the decree of fate?"

"Nothing can be done," was the calm and sad reply. "It is fated that in saving your life I shall lose my own."

"This must not—*shall* not be!" Cibuta declared, emphatically.

"Ha, ha, ha!" the old woman laughed. "How can *you* change it to make it otherwise?" she asked.

"I can hire men to watch over you and protect you," Cibuta responded.

"Useless, useless. It is so to be." And then she added:

"But you have not promised me. Will you avenge my death?"

"If it comes to that," was Cibuta's reply, "I will."

"Will you swear that you will?"

"I swear that I will avenge you."

"Then I shall not try to escape my fate."

"I might leave you to yours, and your pretty bride to hers, and thus avoid the murderer's knife; but I will not."

"So it is to be, and so it *shall* be—*must* be!"

"But, Mother," Cibuta still protested, "can you not warn me of my danger, and let me guard against it, and thus keep out of danger yourself?"

"Alas! no," the old witch answered.

"And why?"

"Because, as I have told you before, I cannot foresee all things, and I do not know in what form nor at what time the crisis will come."

Let us here observe that this conversation was carried on in the Spanish language.

"And you say that you are again to save my life?"

"I cannot say that I will be the direct means of saving your life, for you are protected by the charmed daggers; but there will come a time when I shall hasten to warn you of danger, and in so doing I shall perish."

"But, Mother Wolf, it will be folly for you to rush into a danger from which you anticipate death."

"You must not do so."

"You must leave me to take care of myself, Mother; and if I cannot do it—well, then let me meet my fate."

"And why would it be folly? You are young, and have long and useful years before you. I am right at the verge of the grave. My years are numbered, and I am near the end of the journey."

"All the more reason, Mother, why your death should be a natural one and not one by violence. I am—"

"It is of no use," the old woman here interrupted. "It is so to be, and it cannot be changed."

"Remember, though, your oath. *Avenge my death!*"

"I have sworn to do so."

This conversation was of much greater length, but enough for our purpose is here given.

Just as Cibuta uttered the last words, Bill Twicker, Jem Patterson and the others came up.

"Did you clear them out of the valley?" Cibuta asked.

"We did, you bet!" Bill answered. "But, pard alcalde, we've lost a good man an' citizen, an'—"

"Whom?" Cibuta demanded.

"Tom Billin's, pard."

"Too bad—too bad. But he shall be avenged!"

"Bung-eye Camp shall pay dearly for this night's work."

And a general vow was then and there registered to that effect.

Mother Wolf was about to move away when suddenly Bill espied her.

"Oho!" he exclaimed. "It war you, eh? I thought there must be some witch-knife at work. Bully fer you, Mother, bully fer you!"

"But how 'bout them 'ar snakes?" queried Jem Patterson. "How did ye do *that*, old woman?"

"Simply enough," was the response. "I prepared a great bunch of squibs for just that purpose, and touched fire to them at the right moment."

"But I must away. Beware—beware. Take care—*take care!*"

And as she uttered the words she hastened from the scene.

And then the men of Ante-Bar again took up their dead, and all was ended—thus far.

The sound of wedding-bells had scarce died away, yet funeral knells were at hand.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CIBUTA TO THE FORE

TOM BILLINGS had been a great favorite at Ante-Bar, and his untimely death was a sad event.

The body was taken to the cabin the young man had so lately occupied, and there it was laid out by kindly hands and left to the care of Jeff Parsons, who had been Tom's most intimate friend.

The men of Ante-Bar were greatly disappointed to think they had not been able to avenge the young man, and the others who were wounded, but they swore to have revenge at no distant day.

A grave was made for those of the Bung-eye Camp rascals who had met their death during the short battle, and they were put into it and covered over with but little ceremony.

The surrender had proved to be more of a surprise to the citizens at large than to Cibuta John.

But, an hour later, after all the excitement was over, the town was once more silent and dark, and the citizens were, for the most part, abed and asleep.

At a reasonably early hour next morning there was a great crowd in Bill Twicker's saloon, the Pleasant Hour, but a little later on they all adjourned to the Town Hall, Bill locking his place up and going with them.

There was to be a public meeting in regard to the surveying of the Bartolo land claim.

Cibuta John and the surveyors were there when the crowd arrived.

Cibuta made a little speech, in which he introduced the surveyors and explained the terms upon which he had secured their services, and the crowd approved all that had been done.

Then the chief of the surveyors asked numerous questions, examined all the old papers—or at least the copies which lawyer Skynn had procured, and at length said that he was ready to begin.

Cibuta John appointed a suitable escort of men from the town, and an hour later the party set out.

The day appointed for the trail at Santa Fe was now fast approaching, and the surveyors would have jest about time enough to complete their task and make their report, but no more.

Except the survey, everything had been prepared, and lawyer Skynn had his line of defense all marked out.

Lawyer Skynn's personal appearance was somewhat against him, but Messrs. Jingle and Joy had already found that he was exceedingly cute and brainy, and, if the truth could have been known, they began to tremble for their client's cause.

Mr. Skynn's air was always so confident that they feared he was holding a powerful trump in reserve, though they could not guess what it could possibly be.

And Mr. Skynn *was* confident.

If the survey proved anything crooked in the case, then his success was assured; and if not—Well, his line of defense was well chosen, and he had not neglected a single point.

"Oh, we'll make this Mexican dog of a Bartoly mighty sick afore we gits done wi' him, pards, an' don't ye fergit it!"

So declared Bill Twicker, as he and his crowd returned to the saloon, after the surveying party had gone.

And so they all agreed.

Late in the afternoon poor Tom Billings was buried, and many an eye was dim as the rude coffin was lowered into the grave.

Then passed several days in which no more exciting events came to pass.

At the end of the fifth day the surveying party returned to town.

When the chief made his report, lawyer Skynn fairly danced with joy.

Not only had Don Juan Bartolo "drifted" his claim northward a dozen miles or more, but he was actually trying to obtain something like a hundred square miles more than his papers called for.

His claim was all straight, so far as his real grant was concerned, but he wanted more.

He wanted nothing less than the town of Ante-Bar, with all the rich silver mines that had been opened at and near that place.

But he had overdone it.

He had run against a snag.

Of this he knew nothing, though, and a grand surprise awaited him.

The citizens of Ante-Bar were all jubilant.

The day for the trial was now at hand, and Cibuta John, Lawyer Skynn and a number of the chief citizens set out for Santa Fe.

They traveled all day and part of the night, but they reached their destination in safety, and next morning found them on hand at the opening of the court.

Before leaving home, Cibuta had taken every precaution for the safety of his wife during his absence.

In addition to this man Smith, he had engaged four good men to guard the house at night.

He felt no uneasiness concerning her.

The case of Don Juan Bartolo against the officers and citizens of the town of Ante-Bar, was the first one called.

Jingle and Joy were both on hand, evidently determined to make a hard fight.

Their client had no doubt promised them a rich slice out of the pie.

They opened their case with great vigor, brought forth their proofs, made eloquent speeches, and, as Bill Twicker expressed it—"jest riz halleluoyer in ginerel."

Then they rested to allow the other side a chance.

Lawyer Skynn set to work very coolly.

He went to work in a very roundabout way, and reserved his best trump for the last trick.

He argued the case very strongly, brought all to bear against the Mexican that he possibly could, and no doubt had a fair chance to win; but he did not rest here.

"Furthermore," he said, "we have, at great expense, had this tract surveyed; and we find that our town of Ante-Bar is situated not less than twelve miles north of the northernmost border of this old Mexican grant."

Had a bolt of lightning flashed into the room, it could not have created greater excitement.

Messieurs Jingle and Joy, before so calm and smiling, were upon their feet in an instant, both pale and excited.

"Proof!" they yelled. "Proof! *proof!*"

"Here it is," responded Skynn, and he handed the surveyor's report to the Court.

The case was lost, and well they knew it.

The judge examined the papers, and presently said:

"I only wonder that this man did not claim the whole Territory."

"I dismiss the case."

"I only—"

But his voice could no longer be heard.

Don Juan Bartolo was making for the door, followed by almost every Mexican who was in the room.

"What means this hur?" Bill Twicker quickly asked, addressing Cibuta John.

"I cannot say, Bill," was Cibuta's reply, "but I think we had better get back home as soon as we can."

"Yas, an' so do I!"

Lawyer Skynn soon had papers on file at Santa Fe which settled for all time the question of right for Ante-Bar, and then the party set out upon their homeward journey.

It was late in the day when they started, but they had an experienced guide, and they resolved to push ahead all night.

And as they rode along they talked over the events of the day.

Lawyer Skynn was complimented as many as a hundred times, by first one and then another.

Jeff Parsons declared positively that among those in the court-room he had recognized some of Captain Pedro's men.

And this was not doubted, for that Don Juan Bartolo and Captain Pedro were in some way working together, was certain.

Whether Captain Pedro and his men were hired by the worthy Don or not, no one could say; but there was certainly some understanding between them.

Cibuta and his men had covered about half the distance on their homeward way, perhaps, and were riding slowly along, when suddenly they were surprised by a command to halt.

And the one who uttered the command was well backed, for behind him stood at least four men with cocked and leveled rifles.

The Ante-Bar party had just turned

an abrupt bend in the trail when this cry was heard, and at the same moment they beheld the man as described.

They all wore masks.

Needless to say, Cibuta John and his men came to a stop.

Under such circumstances, that is far the most sensible thing to do.

"Well," Cibuta demanded, "what is the difficulty, strangers?"

"Is Cibuta John o' Ante-Bar in this heur party?" was asked.

"Yes," our hero answered, "he is here, and I am he."

"Wal, then you're jest th' man we wants."

"You want me?"

"We do, fer a fact!"

"What for?"

"Cause our boss has ordered us ter bring ye to him, dead or alive. An', ye kin jest bet high thet we're a-goin' ter do it."

"You may find out your mistake."

"Nary a fear o' that. We're goin' ter take ye right along, ef it costs us a leg apiece. Ef ye'll come along 'thout any fuss, all well an' good; but ef ye won't, then we'll take ye by force, ef we have ter kill th' hull blamed lot o' ye. You hear me!"

"Now look here, Mr. Shanghai Rooster," said Cibuta, "I know you, even if you are in disguise, and my advice to you is to get out of the road."

"Nary a git! An' my advice to you is ter git right down heur an' surrender."

"And go along with you, eh?"

"Prezackly so."

"Well, now, Shanghai, see here: Who is this 'boss' you speak of? When I'm invited out I generally like to know whose guest I'm going to be."

"Wal, I'll tell ye, fer it don't make no difference, fur ez I kin see. It's Capt. Pedro, th' great Mexican hoss-thief."

"Oh-ho!"

"Jest so, Mr. Cyclone; an' now what be ye a-goin' ter do about it?"

"Well, Cupid, I hardly know. I hate to refuse to go where I'm invited, but you know circumstances alter cases. I see you've got four well-armed men with you, though, and I'm afraid you have got me foul."

"Bet yer sweet life we have!" the giant exclaimed. "Th' boss thought I'd better go fer ye wi' three or four ter back me, even though I allowed I could handle th' job alone. Oh! you're our mutton, sure pop!"

Little the Shanghai thought that Cibuta was only talking to gain time, and had made his last remark simply to ascertain whether these four men were *all* the rascal had.

"Well," Cibuta then said, "such is life, and I suppose I may as well dismount."

"Not by—"

"Never mind, Bill," he added, interrupting Bill Twicker's vigorous protest. "You know me."

Cibuta accented his last word to give Bill a "cue," and happily Bill "caught on."

He understood that the alcalde was planning a way out of the dilemma.

And he was.

He sprang to the ground, but there he did not pause. Like a flash of lightning he struck the Shanghai Rooster a blow that sent him upon his back, and then, ere the men with the rifles could get aim at him, he was standing breast to breast with them, and his revolvers pressed uncomfortably under the ears of two of their number.

"Surrender," he cried, "or *die*!"

Without a moment of hesitation the four rifles dropped to the ground."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DEATH OF MOTHER WOLF.

"Whoop! hooray fer th' Prickly P'ari!" cried Bill Twicker. And instantly he and half a dozen others dismounted and hurried to Cibuta's assistance.

In half a minute or less the Shanghai Rooster and his four comrades were made prisoners.

"Oh! this heur is orful!" the man from Jimtown groaned. "This is orful! I knowed you war a reg'lar flash o' lightnin', Mr. Cyclone John; but I didn't dream thet ye could git away wi' th' hull five o' us, an' 'specially ez we had th' drap on ye so fine. Oh! it's a howlin' shame fer us, an' I'll take no more in *mine*!"

"Where are your horses?" Cibuta asked.

"They're jest back thar in th' bresh a leetle ways," the giant answered.

The horses were soon found, and then the five rascals were made to mount.

This being done, they were quickly bound, and then the party started on.

It was early in the forenoon when at last they arrived at Ante-Bar, and all were completely tired out.

The prisoners were placed under guard, and then Cibuta John and the others retired to snatch a little sleep.

About noon, however, they all turned out again, feeling very much refreshed.

And then Cibuta called a public meeting.

"Steps must be taken at once," he said, "to rid this country of Captain Pedro and his cut-throat band. They are dealing roughly with us, and we must take severe measures against them."

This was greeted with a cheer.

Cibuta then ordered the prisoners to be brought before him.

There were now seven of them, one of the three wounded ones who were taken on the night of the "Jubilee" having died.

When they were brought in they looked, at least most of them did, as though they expected the time had come for them to hang.

But it had not.

Judge of their surprise when Cibuta informed them that if they would betray the band he would set them free.

Their faces brightened at once, and they promised to do so.

And they did.

They made known the fact that Don Juan Bartolo was the chief of the band, and that Captain Pedro was under his orders.

And not only was there one band, but several.

Three parties were at that moment in Texas running off cattle; a fourth was in Sonora; a fifth was in Mexico city, and there were still others.

Of all these, Don Juan Bartolo was the supreme head villain—the great I Am.

Furthermore, the Shanghai giant revealed a plot which was being arranged for an attack upon Ante-Bar that very night, for the purpose of carrying off Cibuta's bride.

Don Juan had sworn to possess her, and possess her he would, or die.

Cibuta John drew out all the particulars—where the outlaws intended to camp, and so forth—and then he immediately took action.

He ordered the prisoners back to jail for the present, and then he called the whole town to arms.

Every man who had a horse was called upon to join.

And the citizens were willing enough, too.

In a remarkably short time all were ready, and then the party set out.

The place where the outlaws were said to be encamped was well known, and two hours' ride brought the Ante-Bar Vigilantes there.

At a safe distance away they halted, separated into three parties, and then at a slow pace and in silence they advanced.

And they were not discovered by the outlaws until they were almost upon them, when, with a wild cheer, the three parties dashed into the camp.

There was a struggle, but it was of short duration, and in the end the entire band of outlaws were prisoners.

There was one missing, however, and that one was the chief, Don Juan Bartolo.

Nor could they learn where he was.

Highly elated over their victory as it was, though, the men of Ante-Bar returned to town with their prisoners, in triumph.

And there the outlaws were dealt with summarily.

Four or five of the ringleaders were hanged, except Captain Pedro, and him Jeff Parsons set out to take to Arizona, where a reward was offered for him. And, we may as well here add, Jeff reached there in safety and secured the money, and there the outlaw captain was executed.

The others, with the Shanghai Rooster from Jimtown Lode at their head, were taken unarmed to the nearest fort, and thence conducted to the Rio Grande by a company of Uncle Sam's "boys in blue," who bade them cross the river and never return.

But we are rushing forward too soon.

Once that villainous band was broken up, Ante-Bar felt more secure.

The Shanghai Rooster had come there to gather wool, as it were, but had been sent away shorn. He had come to avenge his dead brother—or at least he had determined to do so, as soon as he learned his fate, but he evidently had concluded that he had better put the job off.

Don Juan Bartolo had come there to claim everything as his own, but had been beaten. He had tried to carry off the flower of the town—Cibuta's charming bride—but again had he been foiled. He had brought a company of his land pirates to his assistance, but they had failed him most miserably. He had even enlisted many of the Bung-eye Camp denizens under his flag, and among them the "Shanghai Rooster," or as he claimed his name otherwise to be, Jim Jones; but everything had failed.

Where Don Juan was, Ante-Bar knew not and little cared. It was generally supposed, though, that he had taken flight for a more wholesome clime.

But Ante-Bar was mistaken.

The black-hearted and red-handed villain was hovering near, awaiting his chance to plunge his knife into Cibuta John's heart, and either carry away his bride, Nettie, or kill her, too.

He was almost insane with jealousy and hatred.

His fiery blood was fully roused, and naught save death would still his hand.

On the night following the day of the capture of the outlaw band, all Ante-Bar was in high spirits.

The big pavilion, which was, by the way, to remain as a permanent place of amusement, was all ablaze with light; the big "hoss-fiddle" which the Bung-eye Camp serenaders had left in town was standing in the center of the floor; and the place was crowded.

But, although the citizens carried on with wild hilarity, every one was perfectly sober.

The new liquor law had done great things for Ante-Bar.

"The 'hoss-fiddle' was 'played' now and then, but it made such an unearthly and dismal noise that the 'tunes' were few and far between.

Everybody was present, even to Bill Twicker's little dog, Sancho.

Uncle Dan, the postmaster, made two or three of his usual remarks in rhyme, but they were of such length that they cannot be given in full here.

Just when the enjoyment was at its height, though, it was suddenly and rudely interrupted.

A pistol-shot was heard, and Cibuta John heard the ball whistle over his head.

And at the same instant came the cry, in a woman's voice:

"Quick, men of Ante-Bar, *quick*! This way! I am holding the cowardly assassin for you!"

Cibuta and the others rushed to the end of the pavilion, and there they beheld Don Juan Bartolo struggling to get away from the hands of old Mother Wolf, the mountain witch.

"Death and furies!" he hissed. "Let me go, old woman! Let me go, I say, or I will kill you!"

"Quick, men, *quick*!" the old woman screamed again. "I cannot hold him long!"

"Ah! *Curse you!*" And as he uttered the oath the Mexican fired his revolver, the old witch fell with a groan, and then instantly the murderer plunged under the pavilion.

A dozen bullets were sent flying after him, but he managed to escape them all.

"Quick! Surround the place!" Cibuta John ordered. "He must not—*shall* not escape!"

The order was promptly and quickly obeyed, but the men were too late.

The creek ran very close to one end of the pavilion, and into that the villain had plunged, when, swimming with the current with all his strength, he was soon carried beyond reach.

Two of the men lifted Mother Wolf up tenderly and carried her up into the light, where the women present did all they could for her, but she was beyond all help.

"I am dying—dying," she gasped. "You can do nothing for me."

"Oh! Mother, do not say that!" cried Nettie Hucklebee—Cibuta's bride; "you must not die thus!"

"Too late, my child, too late! I braved my fate to save your husband, and I have met my death."

"Oh! Mother, you—"

"Hush, child, and listen. My moments are few. What I have to say must be said quickly. I saw that villain taking deliberate aim at Cibuta John, and I threw up his arm. I saved his—your husband's life. In return I— But, remind him of his oath. He will avenge me."

"In my cabin are papers, my child, which will tell—you—all. They—they are—yours."

"I— But she said no more. The bullet had struck a vital part, and with a single gasp she passed away."

And then Nettie fell upon her breast and wept aloud.

She had learned to regard the old woman as a dear friend.

Nor was she the only one who cried, for sobs were heard on every hand.

In the mean time the search for the cowardly murderer was carried on with the greatest earnestness.

The entire pavilion was surrounded, but, as we have said, it was too late.

Juan Bartolo was gone.

Lights were hurriedly procured, and the space under the pavilion was thoroughly explored, but the murderer was not to be found.

Then the citizens spread out in every direction.

Where could the man be?

They searched here, there and everywhere, but not a trace of him could they discover.

Nor did they, although they spent nearly an hour in looking.

Of course they had heard by this time that Mother Wolf was dead, and every man felt as though he had lost some near and dear friend.

The citizens having been kind to the old witch, she, of course, had been the same to them; and nearly every one could remember some kindly act of her now silent heart and resting hands.

It was a sad event.

Again were funeral-knells to be rung, where wedding-bells had so recently and so joyously sounded.

Singly, and by twos and threes, the men returned to the pavilion, where they found Mother Wolf's body lying upon the floor, now covered with a shawl, and the women all standing silently around, many of them still weeping.

"This hour are too durn'd bad!" exclaimed Bill Twicker, "an' somebody's got ter pay fer it!"

"You kin jest bet yer life!" Jem Patterson echoed.

Cibuta John entered at that moment, and crossing the floor to where the body lay, he stopped beside it, took off his hat, raised his right hand above his head, and then in a solemn and impassioned voice, said:

"Hear me, one and all: By heaven and earth—by the charm of the silver daggers—by the God who made me! I swear that the murderer of this woman shall die by my hand! *I swear that she shall be avenged!*"

Little he thought revenge would come so soon, though.

CHAPTER XXX.

FUNERAL KNELLS.

For fully a minute after Cibuta John's impressive words were uttered, no one spoke, and he himself was the first to break the silence.

"This is sad—sad," he said. "But," he added, "my oath is taken. This woman shall be avenged, if I have to devote my life to the task."

Under his direction, then, the body was taken up and carried to one of the nearest houses, where it was laid out and prepared for burial.

And then the citizens of the Bar sought repose.

But the excitement was not yet over.

Along after midnight a dark figure might have been seen to skulk into the town, had any one happened to be abroad, and that dark figure was Juan Bartolo, the villain, outlaw and murderer.

His eyes fairly gleamed with the fire of

hatred which was burning within him and consuming his very soul, his teeth were hard shut, and his movements were as stealthy as the movements of a cat when creeping upon its prey.

Slowly and cautiously he moved along, dodging behind first one house and then another, and then at last he reached the rear of the Hucklebee mansion.

There he stopped.

For several minutes then he waited and watched to see whether any one was astir, but the whole house was as still as death.

Not a sound was to be heard.

Satisfied that all within were asleep, the villain advanced to one of the windows of the kitchen and pried open its shutters.

Scarcely a sound did he make.

The shutters opened, he next used the blade of a dagger to push back the catch from over the sash.

Then he paused again and listened.

Hearing no one, he next carefully raised the window and noiselessly crept into the room.

"Now," he hissed, with a fierce Spanish oath, "I shall have sweet revenge! I could not win this girl for myself, and she shall not live for him. *I will kill them both!*"

The rascal understood the plan of the house pretty well, he having been quite a frequent caller there on his first coming to Ante-Bar, and thus he was enabled to guess pretty correctly which room Cibuta John and his bride occupied.

Removing his boots, he opened the door of the dining-room and quickly made his way through that apartment and out into the hall.

There he once more stopped to listen.

Nothing was to be heard, though, and then he advanced along the hall and ascended the stairs.

Carefully he felt his way along, making no more noise than a cat would have made were it bent on the same errand.

Reaching the top of the stairs, he drew a dagger, and then moved on even more carefully than ever, if that were possible.

And soon he came to Cibuta's door.

He had guessed aright.

Taking hold of the knob and turning it silently, he found, to his great delight, that the door was unlocked.

He had expected to find it locked.

Inch by inch he pushed the door open, and then he slipped into the room.

Leaving the door partly open, he took his dagger between his teeth and got down upon his hands and knees, and then in that manner advanced toward the bed, the outlines of which could be seen in the semi-darkness.

Reaching the bed, he next took a match from his pocket, wet it between his lips, and then rubbed it between his fingers until they were aglow with the phosphoric light.

Then he rose cautiously and passed his hand quickly over the faces of the sleepers to learn positively who they were.

And what he beheld fairly caused him to gnash his teeth in rage.

The sleepers were Cibuta and his bride. They were in each other's arms entwined, Nettie's head was resting upon her husband's broad shoulder, her face was close to his, and both were sound asleep.

Eagerly the murderer grasped his dagger and raised it aloft, and then—Horror! With a powerful blow the keen blade descended!

There was a sickening "*swish*" as the blade cut through the covering of the bed, immediately followed by a thud as the murderer's hand struck with heavy force upon Cibuta's breast, and then— But let us explain in few words.

In an instant Cibuta John was out of bed, and in a moment more the cowardly murderer was disarmed and in his power.

In its descent, the Mexican's dagger had struck one of the mystic silver daggers which Cibuta now wore upon a silken sash across his breast night and day, was glanced aside, and, although the blow fell with terrible force, no blood was drawn.

Once again had the silver daggers played well their part.

With a scream of alarm Nettie awoke instantly, and cry after cry for help came from her lips during the brief struggle which ensued.

The household was aroused in a moment, and all came hurrying to the scene.

As soon as Cibuta had his man disarmed, he instantly asked:

"Nettie, are you hurt?"

"No," was the reply.

"Then light the lamp, and we will see who this fiend is."

Nettie quickly obeyed, and just as the lamp gave forth its light the other inmates of the house came hurrying in.

"Ah! curse you, it is *you!*" Cibuta cried, clutching his prisoner still more firmly.

"Mercy, senor, mercy!" the coward gasped.

"You dare to ask mercy after this—after your heinous crime of this night! No! You shall die, and die like a dog! I have sworn to settle accounts with you, and also to avenge Mother Wolf, and now your race is run."

"Take him down-stairs, Smith,"—this to the hired watchman—"and as soon as I can dress I will be down."

All left the room, and in a very short time Cibuta John was dressed and ready for the street.

Going down-stairs he found his man there, with the murderer under cover of his revolver, and together they dragged the wretch out into the highway.

Then, by a series of shouts, and several rapid shots from their revolvers, they soon aroused the whole town.

The citizens came pouring to the spot from every direction.

Cibuta quickly explained the situation, and then bade the men bring torches and a rope; and, these being soon procured, the whole crowd moved toward the giant cottonwood tree as one man.

The wretched prisoner begged and pleaded for mercy, but his captors were deaf to his cries.

Arriving at the tree, the rope was quickly thrown over a limb—the very limb from which Cibuta had so narrowly escaped.

Cibuta then made a few remarks, recalling the various offenses and crimes of the prisoner, and then, with his own hands, raised the man from the ground and launched his soul into eternity.

No friendly hand was there to cut the rope, as there had been to save Cibuta John, and in a few minutes the outlaw chief was dead.

And none was there to mourn his fate.

Mother Wolf's sad, strange prophecy had been fulfilled.

It was a stern duty for Cibuta John, but he had sworn to avenge the old witch, and the man deserved his fate.

"Thar!" cried Bill Twicker, when at last the body was cut down; "that 'ar settles it! This cuss'll give us no more trouble, that's mighty sartain."

And everybody allowed that Bill was about right.

The body was put into an unoccupied cabin till morning, when it was buried.

Later in the day followed the funeral of old Mother Wolf.

And so closed the string of incidents and events about which we set out to tell.

As Cibuta John and many other citizens of the Bar had avowed, Bunge-eye Camp would be made to pay for the part her denizens had taken in their late troubles, and they made good their word.

The Camp was little more than a nest of outlaws anyhow, and through the efforts of the people of Ante-Bar it was broken up and its population scattered.

When old Mother Wolf's cabin came to be searched, many valuable papers were found, and among them a deed to a certain tract of land in New Mexico. This land was a tract which had been bestowed upon one Don Juan Bartolo by the Mexican Government many years before, and the deed was made by the same party—Don Juan Bartolo—to his wife, *Inez Bartolo*; and she was none other than *Mother Wolf herself*.

She had married Bartolo at the City of Mexico, but never bearing him any children he tired of her, and at last banished her to the distant land where we find her. He sent two servants with her, but they died, and for many years she lived entirely alone.

Meanwhile, the Don had married again, and the fruit of his second union was his rascally son.

As to Mother Wolf's witchcraft, all she knew she had learned from an old Indian whom she befriended. But, great as her

power was, she could never bring it to bear upon her cruel and villainous husband.

She was literally banished from the world, and as years rolled on she became known as the "Mountain Witch," the "Wild Woman," etc.

Papers found in her cabin told her story.

The land was the same which Don Juan the younger had come to claim, he having come into possession of the original papers, and of course he nor any one else knew aught of the deed held by Mother Wolf.

Furthermore, the old witch left a will, which on the last day of her life she had engaged lawyer Skynn to draw up for her, and she left all and everything to Nettie Hucklebee—now Mrs. Cibuta John.

And in due time all the papers were filed and recorded, and the old Bartolo claim was settled forever.

And so draws our story to its close.

Cibuta John still remained the Alcalde of Ante-Bar, and no happier couple can be found in all the world than he and Nettie; and next to their love for each other is their affection for a little son who bears his father's name, and whom the people of the Bar call "Little' Cibuta."

And no more thriving town can be found in all New Mexico than this same town of Ante-Bar.

Uncle Dan, the postmaster's, anti-liquor scheme proved all that he had claimed for it.

As he remarked:

"Now, pards, ye see that I war right
In votin' liquor down;
Ef we had not shut up that biz,
'Twould soon 'a' shut this town."

Uncle Dan is still there, and as full of rhyme as ever.

Mr. and Mrs. St. Clare are now living in their own house, although the two families—theirs and Cibuta's—are almost the same as one.

Bill Twicker still runs his Pleasant Hour Saloon, and finds that it pays, even though he "don't sell likker thar."

Jem Patterson and his "Sally Ann" still reside at Ante-Bar, and continue to be worthy and respected citizens.

The same can be said of Jeff Parsons, lawyer Skynn, and many others who have shared the joys and sorrows of the town for years.

Jim Jones, the "Shanghai Rooster," has not been heard from to date, though he may "show up" again at some future date.

If he does, Cibuta John will no doubt try and make it pleasant for him.

And the silver daggers? A mystery they were, a mystery they remained.

Our tale is told.

And now, when the citizens tell of the "red-hot" times at Ante-Bar that followed the coming to their town of Cibuta John, they never fail to add the incidents of the "Prickly P'ar's Great Jubilee."

THE END.

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